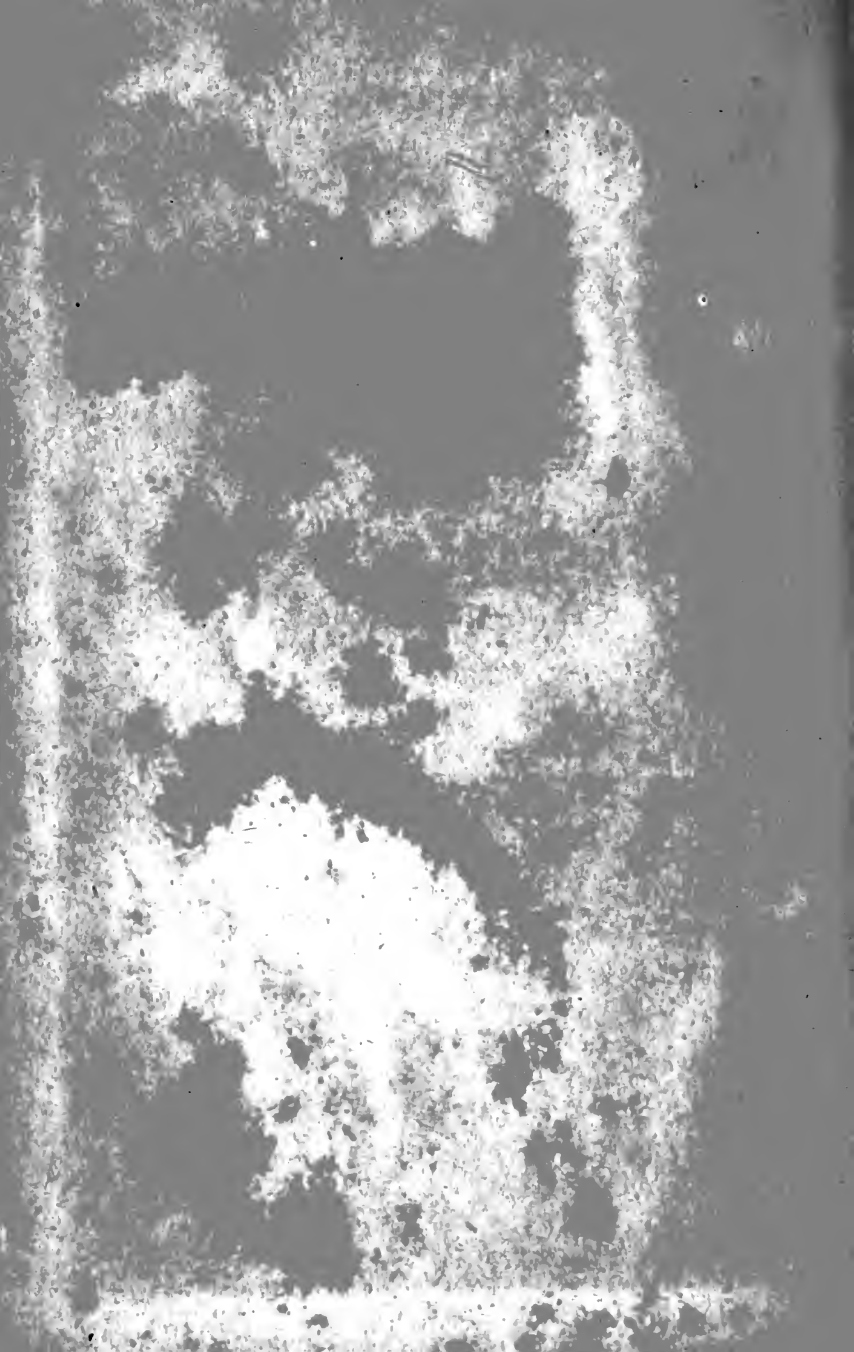




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OUT OF SOCIETY.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. PULLEYNE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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OUT OF SOCIETY.

CHAPTER I.

FOR DAWES TO PECK AT.

"Oh, wad the power the giftie gie us,
To see ourselves as ithers see us."

THERE was great excitement in Rubestown when Rosamond's flight became known.

Rubestown was one of those delightfully pleasant places to live in, where everybody knows everybody's business, far better than they do themselves.

There was not the slightest use for the electric telegraph in Rubestown—do something or say something, at one end of the town,

and lo! everybody at the other end was perfectly acquainted with what you said and did; and not only that, but gave you credit for both doing and saying far more than you ever imagined.

By means of some sort of intuitive knowledge, communicated no doubt through the air, (which was extremely invigorating), people in Rubestown knew to a shade the amount of each other's incomes, their antecedents, pedigrees, if they had any; the style in which they lived; the domestic griefs and domestic differences, and last, not least, any tit bit of scandal concerning their wives and daughters.

Therefore, when the news of Rosamond's disappearance flew like wild fire over the place, people were not in the least surprised, as they had been aware of her goings on for some time, and were quite certain how it would all end.

Such idle senseless work! What better could her mother expect, filling her girl's

head with trash, and letting her mix with the gentry at the Court? Pride must have a fall, and such beggarly pride too as Mrs. Etheridge's, who they knew often had not a meal's meat in the house, who was in debt to every tradesman she could find to trust her, and yet sent her daughter out in flaunting silks and furbelows, as if she were a real lady, instead of a paltry officer's daughter.

Rosamond Etheridge forsooth! who was she, that she should think herself so much better than Miss Millicent Smith, or the two Misses Watson, the lawyer's daughters? Rosamond Etheridge, indeed! who was she that she should be made companion to the young ladies at Bingley, and that Lady Slade should take her about with her wherever she went?

It was a wonder her mother did not see what a fool she was making of her; but it was like a judgment on her; no good was ever likely to come of such

tomfoolery and pride ; as for Rosamond, no doubt her head had been turned by all the fine speeches her grand company had made her, and she really believed some grandee or other would marry her in time ; marry her, indeed ! she did very well for gentlemen to flirt with, but marriage—the men of the present day were not such idiots as that !

And now what had all the dress the vanity and scheming come to ? Rosamond Etheridge had left her home, and it would be a long time they suspected before she would be able to show her face in Rubestown again. She had no doubt gone off with one of the men who had come down to the election, or, as was most likely the case, she had been carrying on with some one for a long time, and had only departed when she had made the place too hot to hold her.

How Mrs. Etheridge would ever be able to hold up her head again, they did not

know. Poor Mrs. Etheridge did not know herself; she sat, her face buried in her hands, sobbing as if her heart would break, when her friend Miss Archer and the two Jones' girls arrived full of curiosity and pity, to see how she was on the morning after the discovery. Such a sad, sad end to all her hopes, such a terrible finale to her life-long drama; all the schemes that had taken such hours to plot and contrive, all the plans that had occupied such nights and days of thought, all wasted, blighted in a moment; and by whom? by the child for whose sake she had endured so much—for whose happiness she had lied and schemed and striven as only a mother can.

Rosamond Etheridge had left her home; whom she had gone with, or where she had gone was a mystery yet. She had brought shame on her ancient and honourable name, and sorrow on all her friends. How to break the news to her poor father in India, Mrs. Etheridge did not know; it would

most probably break his heart. It assuredly would be a terrible blow to the high-spirited sailor-boy, who thought his sister the acme of all that was virtuous and good.

Oh, how could she do it? How could she carry that bright frank face every-day, and know the dishonour she was bringing on her family, the agony on her loving mother's heart? who could have believed those sweet grey eyes, those parted perfect lips, concealed such a world of treachery and deceit? that voice, when it rang out with such clear defiant tones in protest against any subterfuge or falsehood, was uttering a deeper falsehood still—the falsehood of a double-dyed hypocrisy?

Surely there was no truth in human nature if Rosamond Etheridge was false; and that false she was, neither her mother nor Rubestown had the slightest doubt.

On Mrs. Etheridge's lap lay the letter she had found on her dressing-table the previous evening, the letter that told of Rosamond's flight:—the bad deceitful girl

had carried her deception to the last ; the very words she had penned were but a written lie :—

“ Mother, dearest mother,” it said, “ do not fret or worry ; I have left my home, but am safe and well ; circumstances which I cannot at present explain, even to you, have obliged me to take this step. Do not believe anything you may hear, but love and trust me, mother. I am still your ever fond daughter, Rosamond.”

The letter was all a blind, of course ; what circumstances could there be which a daughter could not tell her mother ? and how could she be safe, when her mother did not know where she was ?

“ Do not believe anything you may hear.” Ah, then, there was something to hear ; something which the mother should have heard long ago—something which no doubt many would be glad to tell her, now it was too late—too late, she was gone,

and for ever ; all that remained of Rosamond Etheridge was that false lying letter, penned by a worthless daughter's hand, and blotted by a mother's tears.

In the first impulse of her grief, Mrs. Etheridge had flown off, late as it was, to Chesham. Court, as the place where she was most likely to hear news of her truant child, and astonished both Sir Reginald and his wife, who were celebrating with their numerous guests the successful close of the election, by appearing in their midst weeping, hysterical, and wild, more like a maniac than anything else. It was some moments before she could be induced to explain the object of her unexpected appearance, which she did at last by waving the letter over her head, amid hysteric sobs of "My child ! my child !" Lady Slade succeeded in persuading her to sit down on a chair, and drew from her by degrees the sad tidings of Rosamond's flight. But even Beatrice could not prevent the distracted mother from

making frantic darts at everyone in the room, asking them if they had seen her child.

Shocked and grieved beyond description, Lady Slade vainly endeavoured to calm the agitated woman, whose anguish passed all bounds, when one and all asseverated they had never seen Rosamond since they saw her at the windows of the bank, witnessing the chairing of Mr. Plantagenet Jones.

Lady Slade declared she thought Rosamond went home in some one's carriage, but whose she did not exactly remember: the excitement was so great and the confusion so intense, everybody was obliged to look out for themselves, and the ladies had difficulty in keeping safe hold of their allotted cavaliers. No man staying at the Court had seen Rosamond leave the bank, or taken her to any carriage. She was a general favourite with them all for her gay good humour and merry conversation, yet no one had been so specially devoted

to her as to have formed her escort on that particular occasion.

Sir Reginald kindly volunteered all the assistance in his power. It was a great deal too late to take any steps to-night, but in the morning he would ride over to the police-station himself, and see that every means was put in motion by which to discover the fugitive. He promised to telegraph up and down the country, and have advertisements put into the papers describing the missing young girl. It was "monstrous, unheard of, that any young lady should conduct herself so; a young lady too, who had been received into society by *his* wife."

Poor Beatrice could do nothing but weep with the broken-hearted mother. Rosamond, her favourite, her friend—the girl she had loved ever since she knew her, the girl who seemed to her all that was generous and true—to deceive them so basely, to have brought such shame on her mother, such sorrow on herself; for, if even her statements were true and she was safe and

well, what sort of an alliance could she have formed where such concealment was necessary, that her own mother could not be told ? Beatrice, pure and honest herself, would not believe in Rosamond's guilt ; it must be some disgraceful connection she had made that for the present could not bear the light of day. The unfortunate girl had been led away and deceived, but that she was bowing her proud defiant little head somewhere in shame; that Lady Slade would never believe. Oh, why had she not confided in her ? What had she ever done that Rosamond could not trust the loving friend who had always advised her rightly, and would have comforted and consoled her in any trouble or distress of mind ?

Beatrice could easily comprehend there were many things a shy modest girl might not like to tell her mother ; but there could be no reason why that same girl should not pour into the bosom of a devoted and faithful friend the hopes and fears of an

upright and honourable love. Lady Slade feared her foolish headstrong *protégée* had been seduced into a *mésalliance*, and was ashamed to own her lover's name or parentage.

With her own heart torn with sorrow and wounded affection, Lady Slade endeavoured to console the afflicted mother, who listened with tears of gratitude to Beatrice's defence of her absent friend, but shook her head sadly at the conclusion. Lady Slade was very kind, but she feared the worst; Rosamond was too fearless and self-willed to be afraid of acknowledging a marriage even with a man far beneath her. She was grateful to Lady Slade for her generous sympathy, but she knew her child best, nothing but guilt would make her leave her home, nothing but guilt could keep her from her mother.

The guests at the Court were curious and sympathetic. They scented the presence of a fresh scandal as carrion scent a corpse. They crowded round the

unhappy mother, offering their condolences and advice, and rejoicing in the delicious morsel that was dished up for their entertainment, as the most exciting wind-up to an election they had ever known.

Plantagenet Jones, with his *parvenuism* and his vulgarity, was "awful good fun," but Rosamond's *esclandre* was far more interesting.

The only person in the room who did not enter into the voluble discourse, and significant nods and jests which were taking place on every side, was Lord Arthur Trelawney ; he stood behind Lady Slade's chair, a scowl upon his face, a dark flush on his cheeks, listening in impatient silence to the mother's lamentations and her ladyship's murmured sympathy. At times he would clench his small white hands, or bite his lips beneath his dusky moustache, as some word of slight or covert sneer respecting the absent Rosamond met his ear, but that was all. He, Lord Arthur Trelawney, the known de-

famer of women, whose slightest smile could take away a woman's fair fame as easily as we blow the fluff off the dandelion, stood silent and moody, no trace of either interest or emotion, save in the crimson flush on either cheek, the occasional sudden flashing of his dark eyes.

When the crazed mother, in her unheeding agony, had seized upon him, beseeching him to tell her if he had seen her daughter, Lord Arthur had answered, firmly but gently, that he had never seen Rosamond since they were sitting at lunch together that morning. He expressed his sympathy in words both manly and sincere. Some men, trying to draw him out afterwards on a subject usually so congenial to his tastes, were not a little startled when Lord Arthur, with the coldest of sneers, replied, that he left the anguish of a mother to be scoffed at by men who had, probably, forgotten they had mothers themselves. Nothing greater than a temporary corrugation of his brow betrayed the heart-agony of the

man who heard the name of the only woman he had ever really loved bandied about as a club-room jest. But a vow registered then took its effect in years long after, when not one of the men who in his hearing had spoken lightly of sweet Rosamond Etheridge ever crossed the threshold of Lord Arthur's home.

A little while after, when peace was somewhat restored, Mrs. Etheridge bethought herself of returning to her now desolate cottage. Lord Arthur, emerging from his place of retirement, offered to see her home in the carriage Sir Reginald had ordered for her service. This offer was gratefully accepted, for the poor lady was anything but fit to return alone, and Lady Slade in vain besought her to stop the night at Chesham Court.

Some hope, some wild lingering hope that Rosamond might relent and come back, determined her refusal. Home she would go, if it cost her her life; and when Lord Arthur, giving her his arm, led the

poor, shabby-looking woman through the ranks of that brilliant assembly, every voice was hushed, every smile checked, as they involuntarily bowed their heads to the sacredness of a mother's grief.

Lady Slade had never cared for Lord Arthur Trelawney. His reputed dissolute life, his sneering sarcasms, his haughty insolence, had jarred upon the fine senses of the delicate Beatrice. He was, or rather had been, a great friend of her husband's in early life, and, on that account alone, was welcome at Chesham Court; but she had always looked upon him as a man whose closer companionship was to be avoided, and whose acquaintance, to say the least of it, was anything but desirable. 30

But now, when she saw him with the careless grace, so peculiarly his own, a look of respectful sympathy upon his handsome face, lead the sobbing mother to the carriage as if she were a princess born, Beatrice's heart warmed to him as it had never done before, and she felt that, under

the cool assumption of sarcastic indifference or sneering contempt, lay the true noble heart of a gentleman, that cycles of vice could never utterly destroy.

Miss Archer flew to her friend's embrace. That astute virgin was given to be very gushing at times.

"My poor Belinda! Oh, my poor dear!"

Dear Belinda could only articulate, between gasping sobs, "Oh, my child! my child!"

"Don't give way so, dear Mrs. Etheridge! don't!" cried Maria Jones, who was secretly disposed to take a favourable view of Rosamond's flight, and with whom an elopement was quite an interesting event, suggesting something plucky in the girl who did it. "How do you know some rich man may not have fallen in love with Rosamond, and carried her off, and married her almost by force?"

Such an idea had never presented itself to Mrs. Etheridge's imagination, but

though her eyes lighted up momentarily, she shook her head despondingly the moment after.

"Don't be so idiotic, Maria!" snapped her cousin. "What rich man is there who would run away with Rosamond? And why shouldn't she let her mother know?"

"I'm afraid, my dear, there is no chance of that," said Mrs. Etheridge. "She is a bad, bad girl!"

"Perhaps she has not got married at all," suggested Jane Jones, whose ideas, since the advent of the Rev. Adrian's curate—a pale young man, with a very long black beard—had been remarkably pious. "Perhaps Rosamond has been awakened, and has gone into retreat somewhere, to think over the foolishness and vanity of her life."

"Really, Jane, you are more absurd than Maria! I should like to hear what you will suggest next. Maria proposes an unknown prince, and you a missionary. Was there ever anything so ridiculous?"

"Far worse sinners have been converted," exclaimed Jane, slightly irritated.

"Yes, when they have corresponded to grace. When did you ever see Rosamond Etheridge corresponding to anything she ought to?"

"You are both very kind," cried Mrs. Etheridge; "but I fear you are both mistaken. Rosamond is a cruel heartless girl, and I shall never, never see her any more"—the last words in a paroxysm of tears.

Miss Archer turned up the whites of her eyes.

"My dear friend, you must look for comfort where comfort alone is to be found. I warned you, you know, you were letting that girl have too much of her own way. I never saw a case in which it succeeded—never!"

"I wish now I had not," moaned Mrs. Etheridge; "but what was I to do? She has had quite the upper hand of me for years."

"Train up a child in the way it should go," sententiously replied the moralist.

"There, Sarah, don't be preaching so much," blurted out Maria; "you make me quite ill to hear you. I want to hear all about it. When did you first miss Rosie, Mrs. Etheridge? Where did you find the letter?"

"I never missed her till quite late. I concluded, of course, that after the chairing, she had gone home with some of you, or back to Lady Slade's. I was not at all uneasy until I saw her letter lying on my dressing-table; it nearly killed me!" sobbed Mrs. Etheridge. "I flew to her room, but found she had not taken anything. All her poor dresses were where she left them; the only thing I missed was a little gold cross."

"She might well take that," exclaimed Miss Archer, severely; "it would have been more to her credit to have left it behind."

"Oh, Sarah! it may be the means of reclaiming her," cried Jane.

"Do be quiet, both of you," interrupted the impatient Maria; "you won't let Mrs. Etheridge speak, with your cant. Do tell me: had you any idea Rosamond had a sweetheart? Did she never receive any love letters or anything?"

"No, I never saw anything of the kind," replied the mother. "Rosamond always laughed at the very idea of such a thing."

"So she used to do with us. I am sure she might have been well married over and over again; but she treated every one in the same non-chalant manner. Papa often said she never gave a man a chance; and Lady Slade told me she would not listen whenever she proposed anyone as a suitor."

"Well, she has done for herself now," said Mrs. Etheridge. "I do not suppose she will ever have the chance again."

"No, indeed," replied Jane. "Of course we could not notice her now, even if she came back." At which observation Mrs. Etheridge relapsed into another flood of tears.

"She is a heartless wicked girl," exclaimed Miss Sarah Archer. "And if I were you, Belinda, I would banish her from my mind for ever ; after all you have done for her too. I would write and tell her father all about her, and let him see what a wretch of a daughter he has got."

"I don't see what good that would do," burst out the practical Maria. "What is the use of worrying a man out in India, when he cannot do anything? You had better wait a little and see ; perhaps Sir Reginald will find her. I hear he has set all the police on her track. Or perhaps Rose will write again, when she gets tired of her present position."

"I am sure, dear Mrs. Etheridge," said Jane, "both papa and Sir Reginald will do all they can to find her. You must keep up your spirits, and hope for the best. I do not think Rosamond is really bad at heart."

"I will try to keep up," sighed the officer's wife, with a watery smile. "I am

sure it is very kind of you all, to come and see me in this terrible affliction. Grief makes one so selfish, I never thought of offering you any refreshment. Won't you take a glass of wine or a biscuit?" continued she, yet inwardly hoping that her visitors would decline."

"Well, since you are so kind, I think I would like a little sherry," said Sarah. "We have a long round to go to-day, and it will be late before we can get back to lunch."

Mrs. Etheridge flushed deeply; and apologizing for leaving her guests, left the room, returning, however, in a few moments, looking redder and more anxious than ever.

"That stupid Harriet," she cried. "I don't know where she has put my keys. My head is so gone with all this trouble that I scarcely know what I am doing."

"Oh, pray don't trouble, Mrs. Etheridge," exclaimed both Maria and Jane.

"Never mind about the wine, dear;

a glass of water will do quite as well," said Miss Archer, magnanimously.

But Mrs. Etheridge, on hospitable thoughts intent, was determined to take no refusal.

"It is no trouble; Harriet will find the keys directly. Pray do me the favour to wait a little while. Such a thing has never occurred before; but you will excuse it, I am sure, in the grief I am in."

They did wait for fully a quarter of an hour, while the conversation was continued by fits and starts, sudden silences intervening, during which time Mrs. Etheridge cast nervous glances towards the door.

At length it opened, and the grinning Harriet appeared, bearing a tray containing wine glasses, a plate of biscuits, and a black bottle.

The Joneses exchanged glances with one another.

Mrs. Etheridge pounced upon the tray.

"Oh, Harriet; why did you not decant the wine when you fetched it from the cellar?"

"From the *cellar*, mum," exclaimed the open-mouthed Harriet, in tones of unmistakable astonishment; "why I fetched it from the 'Rose and Crown.'"

"There, that'll do," cried Mrs. Etheridge, hastily. "Pray excuse her, Miss Archer; she is such a fool. No more sense than a tom cat."

At this *contre-temps* Maria and Jane had to hold their handkerchiefs to their faces to restrain themselves from bursting into fits of laughter. Miss Archer's quick, ferrety eyes discovered the change that poor Mrs. Etheridge vainly endeavoured to hide behind the plate of biscuits. The secret was out. Harriet had fetched the wine from the nearest public house during that mysterious quarter of an hour when she was supposed to have been hunting for her mistress's keys.

Miss Archer rose from her chair. "I am sorry to have given you so much trouble. I do not think I will take any wine after all."

"Oh, do take one glass. I am sure it

will do you good," entreated Mrs. Etheridge.

"No thank you, dear. I think I would rather not."

For the life of her she would not have put that vile concoction to her lips—her lips, that were accustomed to nothing but the choicest vintage from Plantagenet's well-filled cellars.

"I will take a little," exclaimed Maria, who, despite her amusement, felt for the nervous agitated little woman. "And have a glass yourself, dear Mrs. Etheridge. I am sure you require it far more than we do." The warm-hearted girl poured out a glass for the grateful lady, and held it to the white, trembling lips. "There, keep up your spirits," she said, kindly. "Things may not after all be so bad as they appear. I will come and see you again to-morrow, and hope to hear some tidings of poor Rosamond."

"Put your trust in God, Belinda," cried Miss Archer, "and beg Him to forgive that poor misguided girl."

"We will all pray for you both. One consolation must be yours—that you did all you could for her. Never has mother so sacrificed herself for her child."

"It is a down-right judgment on her," said Miss Archer, some hours after. "What better could she expect, after bringing up her daughter in that wilful extravagant manner. That's not religion. I am rather glad it has happened, for it will bring down her pride for the rest of her days."

Mrs. Harrington, to whom this dissertation was addressed, shrugged her shoulders.

"I think Mrs. Etheridge has plenty to bring down her pride, without her daughter helping to do it. She always seemed to me a quiet inoffensive little woman ; nothing in her to be sure, but a lady, in spite of all her poverty."

Miss Archer winced—the being "born a lady" was a sore point with her.

"As for Rosamond, it is only what I

expected," continued Mrs. Harrington. "She was a proud, forward minx, and Lady Slade spoiled her completely. She had a free and easy way with her, that was anything but nice in a young girl ; and men would be sure to take advantage of it. I pity the mother, but I have no pity at all for her."

"I pity neither," said the fair Sarah. "I have always liked Mrs. Etheridge, but was never blind to her faults. As for Rosamond, she was simply detestable. I am very sorry now that I ever allowed Maria and Jane to make a companion of her. Such a girl would contaminate a whole school."

Mrs. Harrington laughed. "I think Maria and Jane are pretty safe ; and as for you and me, Miss Archer, we can take care of ourselves. What I think worst is the *exposé*. She ought to have played her cards better, and not allowed herself to have been found out."

"But the sin, Mrs. Harrington, the awful

sin!" cried Catherine Hyde, who had been talking to the sisters, and now looked up horrified at Mrs. Harrington's definition of morality.

"The sin is in the shame and degradation she has brought on her family, the discredit on society. You don't suppose all girls are as immaculate as yourself, Miss Hyde, do you? If Rosamond Etheridge chose to do such fie-fie things, there is no occasion why she should blazon it to all the world. She has put herself out of the pale of society for evermore."

"Better, ten thousand times better, she should do that," exclaimed Catherine, an indignant flush on her beautiful face, "than live as she has hitherto done—a lie in the face of God and man. There is hope for her now, she may repent and be reclaimed; but what hope could there be for a woman who knows no sin, except the sin of being found out?"

Mrs. Harrington lay back in her arm-chair, her dark brows slightly elevated, a

mocking smile upon her lips, as she gazed in silence at the lovely moralizer—she evidently regarded Catherine as a being of a different species.

“There is no use arguing with you, Miss Hyde,” she said, after a pause; “and, to tell the truth, the subject is not at all to my taste. Let the girl remain in the dirt, to which she has condemned herself; I would not raise a finger to pull her out of it if I could.”

Mrs. Harrington turned to Miss Sarah Archer.

“I hope,” she said, “poor Mrs. Etheridge is calmer to-day. She was more like a lunatic than a woman last night; rushed into the drawing-room at Chesham Court, and darted frantically at every one, asking them if they had seen her child.”

“There was a reason for it last night,” replied Miss Archer, significantly; “but I can assure you, Mrs. Harrington, I did not like her manner at all to-day, it was so wild and strange. I hope she is not really going mad.”

"Mad with grief," suggested Maria.

Miss Sarah pursed up her lips and looked mysterious.

"Ah, my dear ! you are young and don't know the world as well as I do ; but I have had a strong suspicion on my mind for some time."

"Goodness gracious, Sarah ! you surely don't think she is demented ?"

"No, not that ; but worse."

"Worse ! Whatever could be worse ?" exclaimed all the women in chorus.

"Well, I may not be right ; but did you never notice how strange and excited she is at times ? how absent she grows, and how she stares with her eyes ?"

"I know she is often in a dreadful fluster when we go."

"Well, I am afraid—perhaps I ought not to say it,"—and the spinster lowered her voice to a whisper, "that our poor dear friend——"

"What ?" cried Maria. "Do be quick, Sarah, and tell us what it is."

"Ah! but you must not say that I said so; I might not be right, you know."

"No, no!" cried the girls. "Pray, do tell us what she does?"

Miss Archer glanced round the room as if to see there was no one listening.

"*Drinks!*"

"Drinks! drinks!" exclaimed her auditors, one after another.

Mrs. Harrington lay back in her chair, and laughed until the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"I haven't heard a better thing for weeks," she cried. "What! that nervous delicate little woman a tippler? Miss Archer, Miss Archer! you'll be the death of me!"

"It's all very well to laugh!" angrily retorted Sarah, who, the murder being out, was determined to hold her own; "but I am sure of it. I can smell her strong of spirits whenever she kisses me. I have been going to hint it to her once or twice, but did not like."

"Well, if she drinks I never saw a sober person," said Mrs. Harrington. "I scarcely like to contradict you, Miss Archer, as, being her most intimate friend and a member of the same congregation, you ought to know ; but I can hardly believe it."

"Whether you believe it or not, it is the fact ; her nervousness is all that. I think Mr. Hope should be told about it, if he does not know already."

"Poor Mrs. Etheridge ! trouble must have made her do it," said Catherine, pityingly.

"Nothing of the sort, my dear ! it is in the disposition. She must have low ideas about her somewhere. 'What is bred in the bone will come out of the flesh.' Fancy her sending for wine for us from a common public-house ; that alone showed she was accustomed to such things. I don't think I'll ever go to Fern Cottage again," exclaimed the virtuous Sarah.

The allusion to the public-house caused

the story of the wine to be repeated, to the infinite amusement of Mrs. Harrington, who laughed till she cried. Even the grave Catherine could not resist a smile. A thousand reminiscences of the poor little woman confirmed the coterie in their ultimate belief of Miss Sarah's statement, and the house adjourned, with the resolution that nothing good ever came of bringing people "Out of Society" into another sphere.

CHAPTER II.

BREAKERS AHEAD.

ROSAMOND ETHERIDGE's mysterious elopement was a nine days' talk in Rubestown. It quite eclipsed the glories of the election, which seemed to disappear with the bunting and the platforms, and certainly bid fair to take some of the gilt off the gingerbread seat of the great Plantagenet Jones.

This was a mystery. A young lady, well bred and well educated, suddenly disappears in the middle of a fine spring day, without any one knowing her whereabouts or seeing her depart. It was true that nearly all Rubestown was congregated at one particular spot where the hustings were

erected; but still there were sufficient stragglers on the outskirts of the town to notice a well-dressed and elegant young woman in whichever direction she went.

A great many persons were ready with the information that they had seen a young lady answering the description get into a cab that was returning to the railway station.

Some even averred that a muffled female, closely veiled, was observed going down the steps that led to the staith on the river side; but when the information was criticised, it all amounted to nothing. Some discrepancy was sure to arise in either the figure or the time. A great many well-meaning persons were eager enough to inform the distracted mother that they had been aware for a long time of her daughter's stolen walks by the river-side, with a tall dark gentleman. Others, on the contrary, declared that a fair stout man continually waited for Rosamond Etheridge at the doors of the church; but when asked to identify the unknown, said they had never

seen the person in any other society but that of the missing girl.

The police also, who were certainly not so alert then as now, failed to obtain any tidings of her. Advertisement after advertisement appeared in the *Times*, without any result. Those who were in Rosamond's secret, whatever it was, kept her secret well.

The mystery deepened, as the days rolled onward, and the despairing mother wept in silence and alone.

Alone—for after their curiosity was satisfied, few, if any, of her former acquaintances came near Fern Cottage, or offered their sympathy to the bereaved woman. The universal opinion seemed to be that Rosamond Etheridge had misconducted herself, and that her mother, though innocent, was the primary cause of her offence. There must be something wrong in that household, where a daughter could take such an indelicate step; one cannot touch dirt, without some of it sticking, and

the righteous women of Rubestown felt it due to their morality to keep as far away as they could from the house on which so much dirt had fallen ; one by one they dropped off, and gradually the little parlour, with its faded finery, knew scarcely another visitor than the Rev. Adrian Hope. As they discontinued their visits, he redoubled his. He had been greatly pained and grieved by the falling away of one of his little flock ; one, too, who, however careless and wilful she might appear, was always ready to help him in any matter that needed her assistance. He was sorry too for her mother. His large and noble mind could look far beyond the petty weakness of an ill-disciplined, wavering nature, into the depths of the mother's heart, where maternal love shone pure and undefiled. He knew the officer's foolish wife, with her foibles and her failings, her insignificant griefs and petty meannesses, was capable of an amount of self-sacrifice and devotion of which they that scoffed at and reviled her were utterly devoid.

He had been a minister of God so long that the hearts of his people lay bare before him, and there was a Christ-like gentleness in the way in which he passed over their faults in order to fathom the motives that actuated them.

It was this which filled him with such tenderness and pity for the poor mother who had wasted all her days in carrying out a delusion, and who now sat, her hopes blighted, her efforts thwarted, in her desolate childless home.

Bitter indeed must be her thoughts—bitter indeed her remorse. This was a house in which his presence was needed, and day by day he called to comfort and alleviate.

His own life lately had not been one of roses ; ever since the first revelation of his love for Catherine Hyde flashed across him like a ray of electric light, he had been struggling with the mingled feelings that lacerated his heart—the knowledge that such was undoubtedly the case, and his desire for a celibate life; the more he saw of his fair parishioner the deeper he felt

himself entangled by her beauty and her virtue. She was to him as "one set apart," in that little world of folly and sin, over which he had spiritual charge. He could not help thinking what a sweet and happy life it would be, passed with a companion like her, whose soul was as his soul, whose every thought was one of religion. How she would help and console him in his arduous duties; how her fair and gracious presence would bless his home; how her love would inspire and animate him—*her* love! Ah heaven, what unutterable bliss, and, on the other side, the words—"He that is without a wife, is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please God; but he that is with a wife, is solicitous for the things of the world, how he may please his wife," were ever before him, and a pale crucified Face looked down from the oratory in his little room, and the white holy lips seemed to mutely breathe, "Be thou faithful unto death,^s and I will give thee a crown of everlasting life."

"Ah, dear Lord, what should he do?"

There was his duty—his people—the souls that had been placed under his charge, and for whom he would have to account at the last great day; and there was his love for this beautiful Catherine, and his tender human heart.

What should he do?

Should he fly and leave them to some other pastor; one perchance who would not have their interest so much at heart? Should he, faithless shepherd, basely desert his post because a woman was most fair to see, and his eyes had desired her beauty?

No, he must stay and battle on, wrestling and fighting with the enemy that had taken possession of his soul; the struggle might kill him in the end, but he would have "fought the good fight"—he would have "kept the faith." So to all human weakness, all human sorrow, Adrian Hope grew gentler and more compassionate.

It was only to himself that he was hard,

to all in trouble he was tender and kind as a woman, entering into their distresses as if they were his own, smoothing the rough edges away from the thorny uphill path of many a tortured soul. No one could imagine who saw the young clergyman wending his way with a sweet melancholy smile on his pale thin lips—the light of a matchless purity shining out of his dark earnest eyes, that a struggle was going on within him, to which all the trouble and sorrow of others seemed by comparison to be mere child's play.

As for Catherine Hyde herself, the dawning of love within her heart was fraught with a delicious pain, a restless unrest, that filled her bosom with tumultuous pleasure. The knowledge that her young pastor was nearer and dearer to her than any man she had ever known, brought with it no guiltier feeling than the first warm blush of happy and reciprocated love; she knew that he loved her, she saw it every day of her life, in the sudden lighting of his eyes, the

unconscious tenderness of his tones, when he addressed her, and she was happy to remain in that blissful knowledge, till the day should arrive when she should hear it from his own dear lips. She often thought, with soft warm blushes, how gladly she would place her hand in his, and tell him she had loved him—him only, ever since they first met ; how they would commence a fair new life together, of which earth was but the resting place, eternity the home. The proud maiden smiled in her regal beauty at the thought of the glad surprise that would come into her lover's eyes when he learnt for his sake she had refused a coronet, and was more than content to bring her loveliness and noble birth to grace his home, and share his lot whatever that might be. She had little fear for the future, she was sure Sir Reginald Slade would not, for pride's sake, allow his sister-in-law to become a portionless bride, and Adrian's titled connexions would be certain to do something for them when they heard he

had married a lady of position, if not of wealth. So she was content to wait, not that she would have been sorry had the end come soon, as her life beneath her sister's roof was anything but happy.

Sir Reginald was just now often intoxicated ; and at such times his temper was unbearable, driving not only the servants but his wretched wife before him, and causing all the inmates of the house to tremble with fear—all but Catherine. His tempers never affected her, save for the sin it caused, and the misery it gave her unhappy sister. She would stand, proudly calm, her steady blue eyes fixed upon his face with unutterable scorn. He might rave and storm as much as he pleased, he never disturbed her serenity ; and on nearly all occasions it was he who slunk away from her, cowed by the majesty of her maiden purity.

When he became himself again he was more than kind to her ; he greatly admired his beautiful sister-in-law, and though he

scoffed at her religion, was not insensible to its effects. During his transient fits of penitence he lavished both on her and Beatrice everything their hearts could desire.

Beatrice, contrary to the advice of her friends, had married without settlements. Sir Reginald had offered handsomely ; but with all a girl's admiration for the man who had taken her penniless and without any expectations, Beatrice had insisted on not having any income apart from her husband.

In spite of his harshness and cruelty, Lady Slade had, up to the present time, no reason to repent of her decision. Sir Reginald could be both kind and courteous when he chose, and kept both her and her sister amply supplied with money. The two women therefore knew no limit to their means or their extravagance ; both were extremely fond of dress and jewels, and indulged their fancy to the fullest extent. Neither forgot the church or

the poor—Beatrice subscribing largely to almost every charity, and by far the largest share of Catherine's allowance finding its way into the welcome pocket of the Rev. Adrian Hope.

Catherine had another trouble—the only person amongst her female acquaintances who had ever shown the slightest sign of an antagonistic feeling was Miss Sarah Archer, who had behaved to her on one or two occasions in rather an extraordinary manner; but as that generally happened when she was visiting at Bingley Towers, Catherine attributed it to a little jealousy, on account of the marked attention paid her by Plantagenet Jones. That absurd old banker would persist in making Catherine the centre of all his homage whenever he had the chance; and not unnaturally drew upon himself the vindictive tongue of his cousin, who, it was strongly suspected, coveted for herself the vacant place in his heart. But latterly Miss Archer had behaved in exactly the same manner at other

times, more especially when Catherine was known to have had a rather long interview with the Rev. Adrian Hope.

That Miss Archer was fully capable of doing anything to prevent Plantagenet making her an offer, Catherine was quite ready to believe ; but how a marriage with Adrian, which must effectually remove her from the path of the banker, could displease her, she was powerless to understand.

It never entered into the mind of the proud girl that Miss Sarah wished to have two strings to her bow ; and that while coveting the money bags of the millionaire, the graceful form of Adrian Hope found favour in her sight. Or that Sarah argued not unreasonably that whereas, in being Plantagenet's wife, she could only reign over a small household ; as Rectoress, she could command the whole of her husband's flock.

Love of power was the ruling passion of Miss Archer's life. The loss of her former position, as head of the sanctuary and choir,

had chafed and irritated her more than she cared to allow ; but she thought to herself that when she was married, all could be redeemed by the influence she could exercise over her clerical spouse ; and it would be a matter of great surprise to her if she did not exercise her wifely prerogative in a more visible way than mere influence.

Given the man, Sarah would have made a fine Bishop's lady—the way she would have tyrannized over the curates and tortured their wives would have been worthy of a Mrs. Proudie.

It is true the question of age occasionally came into consideration with this ancient virgin, but was quickly set aside. A clergyman's wife should be sober, sedate, and well on in years. It was necessary for the respectability of his position that the woman he married should not be one of those flighty harum-scarum damsels, who spend their time in giggling and laughing, and would only bring discredit on his cloth. Nor should he wed with one like Catherine

Hyde, whose dress and vanity gave the contradiction to her devotion.

As for beauty, that was merely skin deep; Catherine Hyde was indolent, selfish, and proud; whereas Sarah Archer, with all her faults, would have worked her little body to death in a cause that she thought right.

Catherine, quite unconscious of the seeds of jealousy that she was sowing in her unknown rival's mind, went on in her own sweet way, allowing, though not encouraging, the millionaire's attentions, but keeping her heart and its secrets for the Rev. Adrian Hope.

No one had the slightest idea of her hidden love; for the proud beauty, with that spirit of reticence which so distinguished her, never permitted any one, not even Beatrice, to have a peep inside her heart. Religious she had always been, and the extra doses she took since the advent of Mr. Hope were nothing more than might be expected in a person of her character and disposition. She went to church, but not more frequently than Jane

Jones, who was her favourite companion on these occasions. Intimate friends she had none, male or female ; a barrier of cold reserve surrounded the marble maiden.

Beatrice at length grew weary of trying to win either her confidence or her affection, and contented herself with the frozen regard that Catherine designated by the name of sisterly love.

Lady Slade would have liked to have seen her dear and only sister well and happily married, but since she evidently preferred a virginal existence, Beatrice was too glad of her companionship, indifferent as it was, to press her on the point. The poor little wife had a strong feeling that she would rather see her sister in her coffin than tied to a husband like her own.

The years rolled on without bringing one ray of comfort to Beatrice Slade. From secret quarrels Sir Reginald proceeded to open insult, and at last his temper became so violent that Beatrice had to lock herself in her room for hours in

order to avoid the consequences of his fury.

It was impossible to keep all this from the servants, whose sympathies were entirely with their gentle mistress. Many an old retainer gave his brutal master notice to quit, who would otherwise have died in the service of the Slades. From the servants it got to the town, and the scenes and disturbances at Chesham Court came to be a public scandal.

Men avoided Sir Reginald when he came into the clubs, and women publicly avowed their sympathy with the injured wife; but Beatrice said nothing: no murmured expression of feeling, no indignant outburst of disgust, ever won from her lips one word against the man she had sworn to honour and obey; she fled from his sneering sarcasms, his cruel insults, but never save to himself uttered one word of complaint or reproach.

To all outside, she preserved a quiet dignity that forbade remark. It was only

her large melancholy eyes, her pale anxious face, that told the tale to her sympathising friends.

Lady Slade's whole soul was centred in her child, who daily grew more worthy of his mother's love. The slight delicacy that had clung to him since his accident in the river caused him to be quieter and less exuberant, but he was still the same gracious fearless boy, the delight of his mother's heart, the comforter and assuager of all her woes. As Sir Reginald's tirades and paroxysms generally took place at night, Francis saw but little of his father's unmanly behaviour. The Baronet really loved his heir, as much as his selfish nature allowed him to love anyone, and was always more or less subdued in the presence of his son. The pure infantine nature, the angel-light that shone out of his innocent blue eyes, checked the demoniacal spirit of the gambler, and he dared not utter in the presence of that unstained purity the oaths and curses with which he greeted his unfortunate

wife. When Francis was near Sir Reginald was gentle to Beatrice too. The child formed a link and yet a barrier between them. The dissolute Baronet dared not attack the mother, sheltered by the innocence and love of her son.

When we read in the police news of some human savage ill-treating the woman he calls his wife, we shudder as the scenes of appalling horror present themselves to our imagination, and wonder if such fiends do really exist. The only difference between the high-born, high-bred baronet and the vulgar navvy who kicks out his wife's brains with the iron toe of his boot, is, that Sir Reginald was a refined devil, and the navvy an uneducated one. The two natures are identically the same: education and associations have tempered the one, unrestrained passions let loose the other.

It seemed something more than instinct that filled the eyes of little Francis with such wonderful tenderness and love, when his mother came to pass in his nursery the

only hours of happiness she knew ; something more than the quick intelligence of a precocious little baby of five that caused such a firm clinging clasp round Beatrice's neck,—such loving words, such tender kisses. He would put up his chubby hands to stroke the pale sad face that vainly endeavoured to look bright and happy for him. He would nestle fondly to her side and never speak, only the sudden rapid pressure told how deeply the tiny heart was feeling.

Ah me ! how much do children know, I wonder ? how much of human misery can their little minds retain ?

We see it in the prematurely old faces of the children of the poor ; their cunning wizened countenances speak of a knowledge far beyond their years, of sin and sorrow they should never have known.

They rarely, if ever, see the beautiful green fields and bright blue sky, seldom or ever know what it is to pick handfuls of starry daisies or golden buttercups ; the very

atmosphere they inhale is tainted and poisonous, and they seldom hear the holy name of God except as the prefix to an oath !

Francis St. Aubyn de Montmorency Slade was not one of these. Accustomed from his birth to every care and attention, he grew beautiful and bright in the pure air of Moorshire. Beatrice taught him his prayers almost before he could talk, and the quaint odd questions of the child astonished and delighted the enraptured mother, whose heart was ever full of gratitude to God for the boon of her darling boy. So the mother and the child became daily more and more concentrated in each other, more and more isolated from the rest of their little world.

Since Rosamond's flight the boy had had no playmate but his mother, as he repulsed rather than encouraged the advances made him by his numerous female worshippers, and preferred sitting on a stool at Beatrice's feet to the noisiest game of

romps with his nurses. Beatrice could scarcely bear to be separated from him even for an hour, and as she seldom visited now, owing to her fears lest something should be said to her about Sir Reginald's conduct, the two became all in all to each other.

Lady Slade seldom drove out without taking the child with her. She had taught him to acknowledge the salutations of the country people they met, and he would take off his little hat with a touch of the old courtly grace that had distinguished his father in happier days, till his mother's eyes glistened with gratified tears at the blessings invoked on his golden head.

Oh, how proud she would be, she thought, when he had grown up to man's estate, and the loving child developed into the still more loving son !

Surely his father would discontinue his evil practices, when he saw his boy bidding fair to rival the time-honoured glories of his proudest and noblest ancestors.

As she gazed upon the broad lands that formed the heritage of Chesham Court, the stately park, the waving fields, the rich dark woods and pleasant farms, how her heart swelled with maternal pride, to think that one day her son, her darling, would reign over all these, and blot out the vices of his father by his own nobility of soul. It was only bearing for a little while longer, and then— . .

Poor Beatrice, poor mother, a little while longer and the broad lands would have passed into other hands, the boasted name of Slade become a byeword and a shame, and the dreams she had dreamed vanish, like all other dreams, into immaterial space.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH ROSAMOND ETHERIDGE?

SPRING blossomed into summer, summer faded into autumn, and yet no positive clue was found to the whereabouts of Rosamond Etheridge.

Mrs. Etheridge received another letter from her, dated from a foreign seaport, in which she stated she was well and happy, and on her way back to England. She begged her mother's forgiveness for the tears she had caused her to shed, and assured her, as soon as her lips were unsealed, she would inform her of the reason of her flight.

This letter, like the previous one, was

pronounced to be a blind ; it only served to stir up the reminiscences of her elopement in the minds of those to whom its contents were confided, and act as an additional incentive to the tongues of the charitable congregation of All Saints.

Two especially declared their firm belief in the genuineness of the epistle—Maria Jones and the Rev. Adrian Hope. Maria, warm-hearted and attached to the absent Rosamond, defended her in spite of the indignant remonstrances of her cousin Sarah, the sneering comments of her friends. Her own love affair, now fast approaching its consummation, made her tender to all in the like predicament, and she openly declared she would have followed Rosamond's example, and eloped with her Plunger, had her father offered any opposition to their union.

Adrian Hope also, though he condemned the course she had taken, still held to the opinion that Rosamond was not a girl who was likely to disgrace her name or

family by any open or deliberate scandal. She must, he said, have had strong and urgent reasons for taking the sudden steps she did, and for his part, he was quite willing to await the time when, as she herself declared, her lips would be unsealed, and the truth made known.

What he most deplored was the amount of scandal and uncharitableness to which her precipitate flight had given rise—the ill-feeling and rash judgment which all his exhortations were powerless to check.

He tried, not utterly in vain, to cheer the desponding mother. Mrs. Etheridge was forced into a conviction of her daughter's innocence by the hopeful sympathy of her sanguine pastor; but as she was one of those weak-minded, fretful beings who are never happy without a grievance, she continued to bemoan Rosamond's ingratitude and wickedness as if she really believed in her sin. She delighted to recount all her troubles, trials, and anxieties, on account of that offending daughter, piling up the agony

as she reached the culminating point—Rosamond's flight; but as she had few listeners now amongst her own class, she was forced, much against her inclination, to keep her sorrows mainly to herself.

However well he might succeed with the few who really loved her, Adrian was unable to defend the absent girl from the attacks of her enemies and the prevalent opinion that reigned in Rubestown as to the real cause of her flight.

Placed as they were on the very confines of society, the Etheridges had always occupied an anomalous position in the town. Too proud to mix with those beneath them—too poor to associate with the "upper ten," the predilection of Lady Slade for the officer's daughter, had caused them to be regarded with even greater animosity than before. The middle class of Rubestown resented as a slight upon themselves the raising of a girl like Rosamond,—who had scarcely ever had a second dress to call her own, to the position of a friend and com-

panion of the wealthy Lady Slade; while, on the other hand, the aristocracy, who cared for no one without rank or money, looked shy at the admittance into their sacred circle of a girl who, possessed of neither, was nevertheless likely by her beauty to prove a formidable rival of their daughters.

The soreness on either side had not worn away when Rosamond's extraordinary behaviour was the talk of both classes of society, and both were secretly glad of such a termination to their jealousy.

But the world rolls on, and such trifling matters as Plantagenet Jones's election and Rosamond's flight are swept into the womb of time to be replaced by other and more startling events. Rubestown had had many more occasions for surprise and talk before the autumn came, when in the gloaming, Robert Burton, his heart heavy, his eyes sad, walked through Chesham woods on his way home to the farm.

His heart was heavy and troubled, because

of all these things that were taking place, because events were happening every day, which, though deeply affecting him, he was powerless to control or avert. His hands were tied ; he could only look on and grieve, while the hot indignant blood suffused his face, and his heart was torn with an agony impossible to describe. His mistress—his fair gentle mistress—for whom, servant as he was, he would gladly have shed the last drop of his blood, was dying, as he had seen his Lucy dying, hour by hour, day by day.

The scandal of the servants' hall was soon known at the farm, and the impetuous passionate nature of Robert Burton was with difficulty restrained from open rebellion, as he listened to the tales of the terrified domestics, who had heard sobs and tears proceeding from their lady's chamber, mingled with faint low cries and repeated blows.

Mathilde, the French maid, had declared that the scar of a wound, an inch long, was visible on her lady's forehead when

the soft brown hair was pushed away from the temple, and the old butler declared with tears in his eyes, that only the cessation of the moans prevented him on one occasion from bursting open the door, and bearding his brutal master to his face. All this Robert Burton heard with horror and dismay, biting his nether lip till the blood came, clenching his hands till the finger nails indented themselves into the flesh.

"Don't tell me any more," he cried, "for pity's sake ; it is a mercy for him that I do not live under his roof."

In the first impulse of his indignation he would have thrown up his situation, disdaining to hold office under such a tyrant, but the thought that by remaining near Lady Slade he might possibly render her assistance at some future time, determined him to stay and watch the course of events.

What could he do ? A hired servant, a man "Out of Society ;" he dared not express his sympathy, even by his

looks, well knowing how Lady Slade would resent such an act of familiarity. What could he do but wait, and fume, and grieve, till the days grew almost unbearable ?

He had another reason for anxiety, he was no stranger to the mad reckless manner in which Sir Reginald spent his time, his frequent losses on the turf were a subject of public notoriety. The steward was morally certain, that unless some of the money was regained, poverty, not to say absolute ruin, must be the inevitable result. The lands, as he well knew, were already heavily mortgaged ; an immense quantity of the timber had been cut and sold, and how to meet the increasing demands of the agents became each day more and more difficult. Robert Burton grieved and sighed for the broad acres which for generation after generation had known no other owners, for the well stocked farms and cultivated lands which the old Sir Geoffrey had loved so dearly, and hoped so much from under his son's regime ; but most of all he grieved

for the sorrow of Lady Slade, when she learned that all those fair possessions, which she regarded now as her son's lawful inheritance, were theirs no longer, but the property of strangers.

That this must be the ultimate end Robert Burton had no doubt; unless Sir Reginald were stopped in his head-long course, utter destruction must be the fate of his injured family. The steward was one of those men who do not believe in gambling, who saw that for one who wins, a hundred lose, and before whose mind the fact was ever present that riches to them meant poverty to others.

No glittering heap of gold, no pile of thin crisp notes, could ever bring pleasure to a man who saw in them so many drops of blood drawn from another man's heart, so much bread filched from the white starving lips of his wife and children.

How would she take it? What would she do? Lady Slade's antecedents were so well-known to her dependents, that

Mr. Burton was perfectly well aware she had no relatives under whose roof she could find protection, and as for friends—what were they when the day of adversity drew nigh? How could she who loved her child with such devoted pride bear to know that that child possessed nothing but his name, over which his father had cast the shadow of disgrace?

If he read her character aright, no blow that affected herself could ever be so sharp, or terrible to bear, as the stroke that deprived her son of his birthright—her boy of his inheritance.

No! into her life, bitter as it was, a bitterer sorrow yet could come, and that this might be averted was the steward's unceasing prayer.

But whether masters are acting rightly or not, servants must do their duty, and Robert Burton was determined to do his, as far as in him lay to the very last.

He had been busy going over the different farms, and was hastening home in the warm

autumnal eve, having several important letters to answer before the night mail closed. His nearest route lay through Chesham Woods, and as his feet trod the soft mossy turf, he wondered how much longer he would be able to stroll through those dark solemn woods, whose silence and repose were so congenial to his soul. As he walked musingly along, his attention was arrested by a slight rustling noise proceeding from amongst the bushes, as if someone were treading cautiously over broken sticks or dry leaves.

He stopped and listened, and the noise ceased. He fancied he must have been mistaken, and it was perhaps only a rabbit or hare, returning to its cover, but after taking a few steps more he again heard it, this time closer to where he stood.

Robert Burton was a brave man and felt not the slightest fear, especially as he happened luckily to have his gun with him at the time, but the gamekeeper had warned him of the presence of poachers in the neighbourhood, and he thought it not un-

likely he might have a tussel with some of them before he got clear of the wood. The glade he was traversing was both gloomy and dark, the tall trees meeting overhead, their luxuriant foliage forming an almost impenetrable shade. Although the moon had risen long ago, it was only here and there her rays pierced the dusky gloom, and lay in silvery bars athwart the mossy path, making the darkness seem darker still.

Robert Burton stood in the shadow cast by a majestic oak, his finger on the trigger of his gun, determined to wait till the mystery was explained. He was not kept long in suspense, into the midst of a stream of moonlight stole the figure of a man, who raising his hands to his eyes peered anxiously into the gloom.

"Stand, or I fire!" exclaimed the deep sonorous tones of the steward.

The man started slightly, then remained perfectly still.

"Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

A low careless laugh rang out on the calm still air.

"My good fellow, whoever you are, I have lost my way in this infernal wood; come out of your ambush, and put me in the right track, for heaven's sake!"

Although the voice had a ring of truth in it, Robert Burton was not satisfied; he remained where he was, hidden by the darkness, his eyes rivetted on the movements of the stranger who was standing in the moonlight.

"What proof have I that you are speaking the truth? Who are you? What is your name?"

"Who are you, that dare to question me?" was the haughty retort: "if I had a horsewhip with me now, I would soon let you know who I am; pray put an end to this farce, and tell me how I can get to Chesham Court."

Robert Burton stepped out into the open, the moonlight streaming full upon his face.

"Oh, it is you, is it, my prince of stewards?" cried the stranger in a sneering tone. "Since when have you taken up the profession of gamekeeper? Sir Reginald cannot be aware of the treasure he has on his estate, who can unite two trades in one."

The steward's face flushed with sudden anger. "Perhaps it would be as well to be civil," he said, slowly; "Chesham Wood is not a nice place to pass the night in, and there *are* poachers about, though you may not be one."

Again the same ringing mocking laugh.

"So you would threaten me, would you? poacher or devil, it's all the same to me. I know you, Mr. Robert Burton, and you had better not carry this foolery too far."

"And I know you, Lord Arthur Trelawney!" exclaimed the steward, advancing close to where the nobleman stood. "*What have you done with Rosamond Etheridge?*"

At this unexpected attack, Lord Arthur staggered back a step or two, gazing in

astonishment at the steward's face. He then burst into a loud laugh. "What have I done with Rosamond Etheridge? By Jove, but that is a good joke. Do you think that I have murdered her, man, that you look at me so hard?"

"You may have murdered her soul, my lord!" replied Burton solemnly. "There are worse deaths than the parting of the spirit from the body. Where have you hidden that wretched girl, Lord Arthur Trelawney?"

Lord Arthur had recovered his self-possession, which the steward's sudden accusation had for a moment deprived him of.

"What have I to do with Miss Etheridge's whereabouts?" he cried, in a voice of anger. "How dare you, sir, address such a question to me? Let me pass this instant; I will find my way myself."

But Burton, cool and dignified, barred the way.

"Not, my lord, until you tell me where she is."

Lord Arthur smiled insolently.

"I do not know where she is at present," he said; "but if I did, I should certainly not think it my duty to inform you. Pray, what right have you, Sir Reginald's steward and paid servant, to question the actions of your superiors? How dare you couple Miss Etheridge and me together? What right, I should like to know, have you to make so free with her name?"

"The right that God has given us all, to defend the injured and oppressed. I am sure you know something about her, my lord. Be merciful, and spare yourself everlasting remorse."

Lord Arthur made a gesture of impatience.

"This is sheer folly, my good fellow," he said; "I cannot understand your point at all. What reason have you to connect Miss Etheridge's name with mine?"

"Every reason," replied the steward, firmly. "Has your lordship forgotten a certain Sunday evening, down by the river side?"

Lord Arthur started. He perfectly recollected meeting the steward when walking home with Rosamond, and his sudden jealousy.

"Well, what of that? If Miss Etheridge chose to honour me with her company, is that a reason that I should be accused of running off with her?"

"It is circumstantial evidence."

"Of the most barren description," retorted the nobleman, with a perceptible sneer.

"Really, Burton, a man of your years ought to know the world better! Miss Etheridge had surely right to walk with whom she chose without asking your permission."

"Every right; and when I see a man abusing the innocence of a pure young girl, and bringing shame upon her family, I have a right to interrogate him, nobleman or serf."

Lord Arthur drew back in silent astonishment, a haughty flush overspreading his dark handsome face.

"I am not going to bandy words with you," he said, proudly and coldly; "you forget your position, sir. Let me pass. Miss Etheridge would have to sink low indeed before she needs such a champion to take up her cudgels."

Robert Burton flushed even deeper than his lordship.

"She *has* sunk low," he replied; "so low that it is only such as I who dare to avenge her honour."

The small white hand of the aristocrat seized the steward by the collar of his coat.

"Villain, you lie!" he exclaimed, in a voice hoarse with passion. "What is Miss Etheridge to you, that you dare mention her name?"

The steward shook himself free as easily as he would have shaken off a child.

"Hands off, my lord!" he cried. "I can answer your questions far sooner than you can answer mine. Rosamond is nothing to me; if she had been I should not have

waited so long for an explanation. She is the daughter of parents whom I respect. The girl who has grown up from a little child under the shadow of these woods—the girl who was pure in heart and soul until she entered into society. Oh, Lord Arthur Trelawney! I am, as you say, a hireling, a serf, and Miss Etheridge's position removes her as far from me as the stars from the earth; but I have a heart under my steward's coat and an arm to avenge a woman's wrongs, be she peasant or princess!"

Lord Arthur stared insolently.

"Upon my word," he said, "it is a pity the young lady is not here. She cannot be aware that she has such a gallant defender."

Burton let the sneer pass unheeded.

"I have known her from a little child," he repeated. "When others passed the humble steward with a scoff, Rosamond had always a kind word, a ready smile. Oh, my lord! should you ever live to have a daughter, and that daughter be in peril, you

would not stop to argue who it was, nobleman or working man, who should succour her in need. Her father and brother are both away," he pleaded, waxing earnest with his subject; "she has no natural protector at hand. Should I not be less than a man if, knowing what I do, I stood calmly by without one effort to save her if I could?"

Lord Arthur moved uneasily away.

"I don't see why you pester me with all this," he cried. "You have kept me standing out in this infernal damp for half-an-hour listening to your tirades on chivalry. It is a pity you did not live in mediæval times, Mr. Burton; you would have made a capital knight errant."

But Robert Burton was not going to be put aside like this.

"Think a little! have mercy, my lord!" he cried, his voice tremulous with emotion. "That you do know something of Miss Etheridge's whereabouts I am as certain as that I am standing here. Give her back to her broken-hearted mother before it is too

late! Surely, in that great world of London from whence you come there are women enough to serve for a nobleman's fancy, without your taking our Rubestown Rose! I am a poor man, Lord Arthur, and, comparatively speaking, an uneducated one; I know but little of the ways and doings of the aristocracy; but I would rather, poor as I am, appear with a clear conscience before my God, than stand in the shoes of such men as you, for all your boasted ancestry of birth."

Lord Arthur turned on his heel, with a low insolent laugh, then, suddenly wheeling round, lifted his hat.

"You are right and I am wrong, Burton," he said, with a winning grace that was all his own. "Forgive me! If the world held more of such men as you it would not be the spot it is. A word in your ear, my man." He bent forward and whispered a few rapid words in the steward's ear.

It was Robert Burton's turn now to start back and look astonished.

"Is that true, my lord?" he stammered, emotion visible in every feature of his face.

"As true as that God is in heaven! and I suppose you believe that," replied the aristocrat, relapsing into his former careless indifference.

"Then it is I who have to beg your pardon," said the steward, humbly and respectfully.

"Oh, hang it all, man. Don't let us go into another dissertation on that. Can't you see I am catching my death of cold, standing in this confounded swamp. Just let me light up a cigar, and shew me the way out of it, if there is a way at all."

Some ten minutes later, when they stood on the confines of the wood, and Chesham Court, shining in the moonlight, surrounded by its lordly trees, rose grand and stern before them, Lord Arthur Trelawney turned and held out his hand to the steward.

“Good night, Burton,” he said. “You are the best fellow I have met for many a long day—there, no apologies—I think in that little discussion we were about quits—only, as I said before, you were right, and I was wrong; but, remember, when next you take up the cudgels for damsels in distress,—appearances are sometimes very deceitful,—circumstantial evidence is not always an undoubted fact; and a man may have the heart of a gentleman even under the robe of an aristocrat.”

CHAPTER IV.

“AH, LOVE, THY MOUTH TOO FAIR TO KISS
AND STING.”

MRS. STANLEY HARRINGTON was one of those charming little women who have such a facility for making their homes and everything about them seem a part and parcel of themselves.

Harrington House was exteriorily as stiff and ungainly a British mansion as ever was seen—square, red bricked, without a curve, break, or line of beauty about it. You felt instinctively that the interior was the same; that the dining and drawing-rooms were as starchy and prim as a first-class boarding-school; and the bed-rooms contained the conventional old four-posters

and quaint looking presses. You were never more mistaken—the very first peep into the spacious hall gave you the idea of beauty and elegance, for everything rough and ungainly was hidden away under clusters of sweet-smelling flowers, or fragrant evergreens. The walls were decorated with stags' heads, foreign skins, various instruments of warfare, and trophies of the chase ; while two large banners, borne by some ancient Harrington in the field, waved their tattered glories above your head.

A subtle indescribable perfume pervaded the atmosphere; the *portières*, covered with rich tapestry hangings, were no sooner opened than they disclosed rooms and boudoirs that were perfect visions of beauty. The foot sank deep into rich soft carpets ; the windows were shrouded with the softest filmiest lace ; mirrors reflected the form at every turn, and the light that stole through the rose-coloured blinds was mellow and subdued.

Outside was a formal old English mansion ; inside a paradise of artistic grace ; and yet there was no sign of wealth or ostentatious display amidst it all. The richest covering on the couches was a delicate rose-bud chintz ; the lace, festooned in such graceful profusion, was of pure British manufacture. The blue or yellow hangings of the windows were only soft merino ; the chairs were for the most part of fairy-like wicker ; and yet you felt that the hand of an artist, and that artist a woman, had arranged and designed it all. That pale mauve ribbon running through those simple muslins—that exquisite Parian statuette, that vase of delicate graceful ferns, who but a woman, and that woman a genius, could have placed them with such charming effect ? There was no overcrowding, no heterogeneous masses of untold wealth and splendour, as at Plantagenet Jones's princely abode ; no rich and massive furniture, as at Chesham Court. The only signs of anything like affluence were the

ancient tapestry hangings and the thick soft carpets on the floors ; everything else was simple in the extreme—it was the simplicity of beauty, the perfection of elegance and taste.

Stanley Harrington always declared it was his wife's rooms that made him so indolent and lazy ; that subtle incense-like perfume, that seemed to cling to everything in that fairy-like abode, took possession of you the moment you entered the charmed circle, and wrapped the senses in a dreamy delicious langour that was utterly mysterious and delightful.

The servants glided noiselessly and stealthily about. The voice sank to a low subdued murmur. No echoes woke the stillness and repose, save the soft sounds of sweet entrancing music, or the gay ripple of Mrs. Harrington's laughter, as in careless dulcet sweetness it fell upon the ear.

That little lady generally sat in what she called her den—a room that was far

enough away from the entrance of the house to be utterly secluded—that could not be approached without traversing a whole suite of apartments, and that bore not the slightest resemblance to a den, except in the leopard skins that covered the floor. But from its windows could be obtained the finest view of the surrounding country, a view of the river, of the gardens and the distant hills, and, above all, the rich dark woods of Chesham Court, with the turrets of its belfry tower rising high above the trees; and here Isabel Harrington would sit hour after hour, day after day, a smile upon her lips, but raging jealousy at her heart, a world of plots and machinations in her brain. How she hated them all! how she hated the pale unhappy mistress at the Court, the noble gracious child, the cold calculating Sir Reginald!

She would have liked to have clutched all their throats with her lithe lissom fingers, to have danced upon their bodies and stamped all the life and beauty out of their

faces with her small cruel feet. She would have liked to have invented tortures to which to put the innocent Beatrice and her boy, the sneering reckless Baronet. Her life was but one feverish desire to accomplish their ruin, and fate played into her hands in a way that even her wildest wishes could not have deemed possible.

The end was very near, nearer far than she, with all her spies, suspected. She had heard an inkling of the truth that morning, and, resisting a strong impulse to go down to the Court to see if the news was true, she sat and waited amidst her perfumes and her flowers, for the last act of the drama, that had excited so much interest in her, to be played out. She had more than the suspicion that the first scene would be enacted in her own little boudoir, and was not at all surprised when the servant, lifting the arras hangings that concealed the door of her apartment, announced Sir Reginald Slade.

She half rose from her seat as he

entered, a triumphant light in her large dark eyes, a smile on her red perfect lips, the opal serpent glittering at her throat. She would have spoken a few caressing words of welcome, but Sir Reginald, after one hurried glance round the room, to make certain they were alone, threw himself into a chair, and flinging his arms wildly on the table, buried his head between them.

Mrs. Harrington sat silent for a moment, checking the exclamation of surprise that rose to her lips. The Baronet's stalwart form nearly crushed the fragile chair on which he had almost fallen. The delicate ebony and gold table rocked and creaked beneath his deep emotion. Her first impulse was to beg him to be careful—to remove his seat, but the burning curiosity at the bottom of her heart prevailed.

What matter if he broke everything in the room so that his heart was broken too?

So she stole up to his side with her stealthy undulating grace, and laid her soft cool fingers on his heated forehead.

“Reginald, what is the matter?”

He raised his face, flushed, bleared, and swollen. She saw at a glance the man had been drinking heavily, he was dusty, too, and travel-stained; his boots thick in dust, his clothes untidy and disordered, surely a sorry gallant for a lady's boudoir. But no whispered words of mad adoring love ever gave such delight to woman's heart as did Sir Reginald's choking utterances.

“I am ruined, Isabel! Ruined!”

Oh God! Oh God! that life should have come to this, that Isabel Harrington would have risked name, honour, position, aye! and sent her soul to perdition, only to hear those words from the man who sat before her now, crushed beneath their overwhelming force.

She spoke no words, but uttered a quick gasping sob, and drew away from him slowly, her eyes still fixed upon his face.

Sir Reginald sprang up from his seat. “It has come at last,” he cried, hoarsely,

as he strode up and down the room, kicking over the delicate, richly-embroidered footstool with his thick dirty boot ; " I staked everything, even to the last shilling, on the black mare, ' Bella,' she lost, and I am ruined ; curse her ! "

" Don't blame poor Bella," said Mrs. Harrington, reproachfully ; " don't you remember how well she ran at Doncaster last year ? how you changed her name from ' Gipsy ' to ' Bella,' when she won the two thousand guineas ? "

The Baronet tossed his arms about wildly.

" I remember nothing but that she has deceived and cheated me now. I could have staked my life upon her pulling off this race, and she has not even come in third."

" But you are always winning and losing, Reginald," went on Mrs. Harrington, in her softest tones. " I have heard you declare you were ruined fifty times over, and yet you have pulled-up, and won more than

you ever lost. Take heart of grace, and wait till the next meeting."

"Wait!" he exclaimed, with a loud, coarse laugh, "I wish to God I could. You don't know what you are talking about, Isabel; I haven't a shilling left in the world, and Chesham Court and all I possess must go to the dogs. I am ruined, Gipsy, I am ruined!"

It was true, then; the dream of her life, the wish of her heart, was accomplished at last. She sat there, outwardly impassible, but with a wild delirious joy dancing in her breast and in her lustrous eyes. She twined and untwined her slender fingers together, stifling her emotion as she gazed on the noble woods, the undulating lands, the turretted mansion, that ere the sunlight faded would have passed into other hands. Chesham Court, that for century after century had been the abode of the Slades; the old woods, that from time immemorial had known no other possessor, would become the property of some Jew discounter: some city *parvenue*, who would

bring his vulgar wife, his plebeian brats, to desecrate the home that Beatrice Slade had graced, and where her boy had right to reign.

Isabel turned to where the Baronet, flushed and agitated, stood watching her, a strange expression on his face. He must tell her more of this. She wanted to hear the whole truth from his lips, all the sickening details. "I cannot realise it," she said, slowly, after a pause; "at least, such ruin as you speak of seldom comes with such a fearful crash; surely you must have had warnings?"

"Plenty of warnings," he cried, bitterly. "I have been standing on the brink of a precipice for many a long year; but, madman as I was, I thought to retrieve my losses by a successful *coup*. I staked my whole upon the mare, and failed."

Mrs. Harrington looked thoughtful. "It is very sad," she murmured, "but still I do not see it in the light that you do; cannot the money be raised?"

"How, and where? Where could I

possibly find a man possessed of sufficient means to advance the enormous sum I require? or, supposing I found him, would he do it?"

"But you have friends: Lord Arthur Trelawney."

"Lord Arthur Trelawney has not a shilling of his own till his old uncle dies, and how could I ever repay him?"

"I do not know, Reginald. I wish we—I wish Stanley had got it," cried the brunette, in her murmuring caressing tones. "I do not understand business matters, but would not Mr. Plantagenet Jones?——"

Sir Reginald laughed bitterly. "You may well say you do not understand business matters, or you would never have mentioned Plantagenet Jones; he is the very last man in the world I should ever ask; why he already holds half the mortgages on the estate."

"All the more reason you should ask him; you have always been such excellent friends, I cannot think he would refuse you."

"Friends; aye, when I wanted nothing; no one knows that better than yourself, Isabel; but I have overdrawn at least ten thousand pounds, and he sent me notice only the other day, that he would be obliged to foreclose unless I paid up the arrears. What will he say to-morrow when the truth is known?"

Mrs. Harrington gazed thoughtfully out of the window, then turned towards the Baronet. "What do you mean to do?"

"Fly; once across the channel I am safe."

"And what will become of *her*?" She spoke the words with a hissing tone, pointing to the belfrey as she spoke.

"God only knows," replied the Baronet moodily; "I care not, so that I do not see her. She would drive me mad with her puling ways, her everlasting reproachful glances. It is not for her I care, but oh, my boy! my boy!" and the strong man laid his arms once more on the table,

and bowed his head in the agony of his remorse.

Mrs. Harrington stooped over him. "Never mind the child, Reginald," she said, "a hundred things may happen before he grows up; he is too young to understand anything about it now; he will retrieve his fortunes, never fear."

"If I could but have kept the old place for him, the money might have gone to the devil, there is plenty more to be had for the winning; but the old place. Isabel," moaned the gambler, "the old — old place!"

"You should have thought of that before," replied Mrs. Harrington; "not that I mean to reproach you, Reginald. But why should you care so much about a few paltry sticks and stones, if, as you say, there is plenty of money to be had for the winning? You could easily purchase another estate; could you not?"

Sir Reginald came close to where Mrs. Harrington was sitting, and took hold of

her hand. "Do you mean what those words imply?" he asked, bending on her a fierce passionate glance. "If there is plenty of money to be had for the winning, will you help me to win it?"

"Of course I will," she replied saucily, turning on him her dark witching face; "but I do not see exactly how I am to do it. I cannot bet, you know!"

"No; but you can make a man wrest money from the devil himself, only to win one of your smiles. Isabel, I have lost all but you; fly with me to France. I know men there, who will help me to regain fifty times what I have lost. You shall have wealth, jewels, dresses; you shall be queen over all I possess."

Mrs. Harrington's silvery laugh rang through the little boudoir. "Calm yourself, you poor fellow," she cried, laying her soft cool hand upon his fevered brow. "You must indeed have suffered to talk such nonsense."

"I am not talking nonsense," he ex-

claimed passionately. "I am mad with grief, I know, but was never more serious in my life. You must come with me, Isabel, and to-day. I can still raise sufficient money to meet our immediate wants, and you have your jewels. They have robbed me of my home and my child, but, by heaven ! they shall not rob me of you !"

He tried to clasp her round the waist, but Mrs. Harrington drew coldly and proudly back.

"Sir Reginald, you have been drinking," she said. "I pardon the insult, because I believe you are scarcely answerable for your conduct ; but I beg you will never repeat it, or I must order you from my presence."

Sir Reginald stared at her in bewildered astonishment. He did not seem able to grasp her meaning.

"Isabel ! what do you mean ? Have I not told you twenty times over I feared it would come to this, and what has your answer always been ?—'let it come.' You

cannot—you dare not—insinuate you mean to throw me over now!"

"I mean to insinuate nothing," replied the gipsy: "I only remind you, that your words are an insult, and I cannot listen to you."

"By heaven, but you shall listen to me!" shouted the Baronet fiercely. "If you never intended to fly with me, what have you been leading me on for? Don't you know, you little demon, that you have been half the cause of my ruin with your extravagances and your wants. If you never meant to repay me, why have you accepted my presents?"

"It is like a man and a gentleman," she retorted bitterly, "when he finds himself in the wrong, to taunt a woman with being the cause. It is like Sir Reginald Slade, to reproach me with a weakness he himself engendered."

Sir Reginald cringed beneath her scornful words—her withering glances.

"Forgive me, Isabel," he cried, sinking on his knees before her, and catching hold

of her dress. "I was a mean pitiful scoundrel, to allude to such a thing at all. You justly punish me with your contempt; but, oh, my darling! listen to me now. I can—I will return it all! You shall have more, ten thousand times more, than you have ever had."

"Keep your promises for those who value them," cried Mrs. Harrington, tearing herself away from his detaining arms. "I neither want your money nor your love; go, take your baby-faced wife to be the companion of your travels. It is *her* place, her right, not mine," and she laughed scornfully in derision.

"It is yours if you choose, Isabel."

"It ought to have been mine; it was mine, long before *she* came to usurp my right. Sir Reginald Slade, when you offered an insult to Isabel Beaufort, did you never think Isabel Harrington might live to repay it?"

Stunned by her words, he listened to her in stupefied silence.

“Yes,” she continued, flushing with excitement, “I have lived and for this ; there was a time, long, long ago, when in my agony I wept and prayed, but no mercy was shown to me ; a weaker woman would have died of a broken heart, but pride in my case was stronger than love. I lived to have my revenge ; and you, who injured me, have given it to me. You are ruined ; a penniless, degraded, fraudulent gambler ! The woman you preferred before me, whom you brought here to mock me with her pale senseless beauty, her hypocritical piety, will be a beggar, and an outcast ! The child she makes such a fool of now, will be lower in the mire than his future companions ; for he will bear a degraded name, and I shall laugh at them, and mock them, and hold up my skirts as they pass ; and if they wanted bread, I would not give them even so much as a crust, unless it were to choke them.”

Sir Reginald, livid with passion, grasped her arm. She uttered a cry of pain.

"Don't say another word," he exclaimed, heedless of her terrified expression; "don't speak, or by heaven! it may be your last—I am mad, and I may be drunk, but if you dare to utter another word against the woman who is my wife, I will strike you down where you stand!"

She had recovered her self-possession, and laughed insolently in his face—she was brave, even when death threatened her.

"Touch me if you dare!" she cried. "I know it is only women that cowards can bully; but you had better keep your blows for your wife, Sir Reginald Slade."

He let her go, white with suppressed passion. This revelation regarding his conduct to Beatrice came upon him like a thunder bolt. He wondered how she came to know—forgetting that such things travelled faster than the wind.

"You are a devil, Isabel!" he said, after a moment's pause. "A fiend in human form—you are not worthy to lick the dust

of that woman's shoes ; bad as I am, I will give her her due."

Mrs. Harrington shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. "It is a pity you did not find out her virtues before. I have no doubt, even now, if you play the penitent well, she will take you back, and smother you with her maudling caresses."

Sir Reginald strode excitedly up and down the room. "You are right, and I am wrong, Isabel," he said at last; "I did you a bitter injury once, but God knows I have striven to repair it. I cannot be angry at anything you may say, I deserve it all. Curse me if I don't like you all the better, for your spirit and your pride. You look quite beautiful now, Gipsy, you hot tempered little devil—hammer away at me as hard as you choose, but let *her* alone, she has had a hard time of it lately, poor wretch, and is likely to have a harder yet ; you have nothing to reproach her with ; let bygones be bygones, Gipsy, and come away with me to France."

Again he tried to clasp her round the waist, gazing at her in passionate admiration. Again she pushed him away with proud scornful gestures.

"Don't dare to touch me!" she cried, "Don't dare to come near me."

"Isabel, listen to reason; you know I love you—you know I have loved you—you alone all my life; don't rake up the fatal mistake I made once, as the motive to separate us now. I have played for heavy stakes, and I mean to have my prize—storm and fight as you will, you shall come with me! Listen, Gipsy darling, the train leaves Esingwold at six. I have prepared it all—we must leave to-night, or I shall be arrested in the morning."

She had drawn away from him, and was standing in the embrasure formed by the window, where she could see the woods of Chesham, glinting in the parting sunlight. At his last words she turned round, her whole face lighted with its wicked triumph, the opal serpent flashing round her shapely neck.

"Leave me!" she cried, "before I call my servants to witness your dismissal—your words are an insult, your presence a disgrace."

The Baronet's face turned first red, and then livid. He swayed to and fro, as if deeply intoxicated. "You do not mean," he stammered huskily, "that you do not *intend* to go? that you haven't been joking all this time?"

"I mean what I say," she replied, haughtily, "that I desire you leave me, before I make you do so."

He staggered and fell against the wainscoting—great red patches visible on his distorted face, the veins of his forehead swollen into knots.

"Isabel!"

There was a world of anguish and entreaty in his voice, he was only just beginning to realise the truth; but the woman's heart was as hard and unrelenting as a stone.

"Silence, sir," she exclaimed. "I am

Isabel to you no longer—go, while you have yet time to cheat the law of its prey, the gallows of its victim—go, and remember that I hate you—hate you like poison,” stamping her little feet, “and shall hate you till death ! I know nothing in the world so vile or so contemptible, that it could bear the name of Sir Reginald Slade !”

He strode towards her, madness in his face, murder in his eyes.

Quick as lightning, she anticipated him, with one bound she reached the fire-place, her hand upon the bell.

“One step nearer, and I ring !”

But the Baronet was already retreating towards the door, backwards—slowly backwards.

“Curse you,” he said, slowly and emphatically. “Curse you”—his eyes were fixed on her to the last, the arras fell behind his retreating form. Then a laugh mocking and fiendish, such as fell on the ears of Faust, in Marguerite’s garden, or greeted Vathek and Nouronihar in the

halls of Eblis, rang through the dainty room, with its perfume, its lights, and its flowers, to be echoed on the confines of Hell.

Half an hour afterwards, Mr. Harrington strolling into his wife's apartments found that little lady, crouched on a low settee, sobbing as though her heart would break. The kind-hearted fellow whose love for his fanciful wife had greatly increased since the adventure in the boat, knelt down before her, and drew her hands away from her face.

"Isabel, darling, what is the matter?"

There was no answer, only the sobs grew louder and more hysterical.

Stanley felt quite alarmed. "Isabel, what has happened? Who has distressed you like this?"

She laid her head upon his broad manly shoulders, and twined her arms around his neck.

"Sir Reginald," she sobbed—"he is

mad, quite mad. Stanley, he has been here, and has almost terrified me to death."

"Slade been here, and mad!" exclaimed Mr. Harrington, in surprise; "whatever do you mean, Isabel?"

"He says he is ruined, and is obliged to fly. I thought he was going to murder me."

"Murder you? Why, what have you done to him? he must be mad indeed to threaten you, my little wife. Why, Isabel, I always thought Sir Reginald admired you? I am awfully sorry if it's true, about his ruin, but I have heard something of the kind before."

Mrs. Harrington clung piteously to her husband's arm.

"He says he is; I am sure his head is quite gone. Oh, Stanley, dear, if you should meet him don't notice anything he says. Get out of his way as soon as you can."

Mr. Harrington burst into a laugh.

"Why, my kind-hearted baby, don't be such a silly. I should not be afraid of poor Slade, if he were ever so mad. I suppose

he has been drinking, if the truth were known."

"Yes, Stanley, he has been drinking dreadfully, I am sure ; and his clothes were all covered with dirt. Oh ! you cannot think how he has terrified me !"

"He was certainly not fit to enter a lady's presence in that state," said Stanley, with a slight frown of annoyance. "I never knew Slade to forget himself like that in the whole course of my life ; he must be in awful trouble !"

Mr. Harrington paced the room in thoughtful agitation.

"What did he say about Beatrice ? What is Lady Slade to do ?"

"He never mentioned her at all," the lying lips replied.

"Nor the child ?"

"Nor the child. I tell you, Stanley, he was like a raving lunatic, and his whole conversation was about himself."

"It's the queerest thing I ever heard ; but I hope it won't turn out so bad as you

say. When his drunken fit is over perhaps we shall hear what the row has been about. Let me see," consulting his watch, "there is half-an-hour yet before dinner. Suppose I run down to Chesham Court, and have a look at what is going on?"

"Oh no, Stanley!" exclaimed his wife imploringly, twining her arms around him. "I shall be in terror if you leave me, for fear that dreadful man may return or meet you. Oh, Stanley! suppose—suppose he should kill you?"

"I don't think that at all likely," replied her husband, smiling. "I rather fancy I'm more than a match for twenty drunken men. As for his madness, I shall believe it when I see it. Calm your fears, Isabel, darling! I will not leave you in this agitated state; but I must go now and give orders that Sir Reginald is not to be admitted unless I am at home. I cannot allow you to be again subjected to such gross indignity."

CHAPTER V.

“WHO IS TO TELL HER?”

“It is quite true, Isabel!” cried Stanley Harrington, when he came in to lunch the next morning. “Slade’s off, and the bailiffs are going to be put into Chesham Court, if they are not already in!”

Poor Stanley’s face was as long as a fiddle, full of dismay and perplexity.

Mrs. Harrington looked up.

“True! It never can be true!”

“It is, though,” returned Stanley. “I’ve been down at the bank the whole of the morning, discussing the matter with Jones. He is quite furious. Slade has let him in

for an awful lot of money, and it seems he owns half the mortgages on the estate."

Mrs. Harrington sat down, her face the very picture of astonishment.

"What is he going to do?"

"What can he do? He must foreclose to save himself, or he won't get a sixpence. Slade, it seems, has been borrowing heavily of some Jew bill discounters in London, and they will be down like a shot the moment they hear the news. Slade must have been a lunatic!"

"I told you he was mad, Stanley," said his wife, bending over her flowers to hide the triumphant light that glittered in her eyes.

"He must have been mad for a long time to have got himself into such a hole. Poor Lady Slade! whatever will become of her?"

And Stanley, with quite a distressed look on his honest face, glanced appealingly at his wife.

"I am sure I don't know," replied that lady, shrugging her shoulders. "I suppose

she will go to her friends until the thing blows over. If she comes well out of this, I don't see Sir Reginald is such a loss after all."

"If she comes well out of it! She has not a penny, not a rap, that I can make out. The stupid little woman married without any settlements, and the creditors take the whole."

Mrs. Harrington turned away to hide the smile that played around her lips.

"Does Beatrice know all this?"

"No. Hang it! there's the confounded bore. She hasn't an idea as far as I can make out. The question is, who is to tell her?"

Isabel Harrington started.

"I will," she exclaimed, as she laid down her knife and fork.

"You, Isabel? You?"

"Yes, I. Am I not her most intimate friend? And is it not better it should come from a woman's lips? You men are so rough, so blunt: you cannot put things in a gentle way."

Stanley Harrington rubbed his forehead thoughtfully.

"I never thought of that. Jones and I have been racking what brains we had left all the morning to find out who was to communicate this most unpleasant news. Miss Hyde, being absent, makes the thing still more awkward; and, although she will return to-night, every moment is of consequence to prevent poor Beatrice having a severe fright. Jones could not tell her, of course, as, in the unfortunate position in which he is placed, there must necessarily be a coolness between the families, and I—I would rather run a mile. I cannot get on with women at all, especially if they make a scene."

"Of course you could not, you great lazy thing," smiled Isabel. "No one ever expected you could. Why you might have known I was the fittest person to tell poor Beatrice. I am sure she will take it best from me."

"You are a clever little woman; and I

really don't know what I should do without you," exclaimed her husband, admiringly. "You have taken quite a load off my shoulders. I wish we had taken you into our councils before. But are you sure it will not be too much for you, my dear?"

"Too much for me," she laughed, scornfully. "Do you think I am a soft donkey, like yourself, to tremble at a woman's tears? I shall do my duty, of course; and whatever I may feel, think of nothing but Beatrice and her trouble."

"Well, I don't envy you, you good little soul. I wish I had some of your strength of mind, Bella. It would save me a world of trouble and anxiety."

"It would never do to have two clever people in the family," said his wife, roguishly. "We should be sure to fall out, you know."

"Well, the cleverness is on the right side of the house," said the good-tempered Stanley. "If my stupidity gives me a great deal of trouble, it certainly saves me

a great deal of responsibility. I can sleep while you watch, wife mine. But now about poor Beatrice. I had better go over to Bingley, and tell Jones you will break the ice to her ; he said something about asking Burton to do it."

"Burton the steward ?"

"Yes ; he is not a bad sort of fellow ; and he knows all about the affair, and could explain matters, and so forth. I expect old Baxter, Slade's lawyer, will arrive from London to-night, and it is better she should know before he comes. He is a crusty old curmudgeon, and might not be quite so gentle as we wish."

The faintest possible sneer curled Mrs. Harrington's upper lip. "I will tell her, Stanley," she said. "And I will be gentle, oh, so gentle."

Something unusual in the tones of her voice caused Stanley to turn and look at his wife ; but she was gazing calmly, almost sorrowfully, out of the window.

"Of course you will be gentle, my dar-

ling,” he said. “How could you be otherwise? It is a blessing Lady Slade has you near her at this trying moment. Oh dear! oh dear! Why could not Slade rest peaceably in his own house? Why need he have worried us all to death like this?”

Stanley had a great deal of trouble to find Plantagenet Jones; the little banker, angry and irritated, was dancing about like a parched pea in a frying pan—in and out of everywhere. When he did succeed in finding him, he heard the hot-headed banker had already commissioned the steward to inform Lady Slade of her husband’s flight, and the ruin that had overtaken him. Mr. Harrington thought it was a pity, as Isabel would have broken the sad news far better than the steward, however interested and concerned he might be; but it could not be helped now.

Stanley was detained in Rubestown till it was time to return to Harrington to dinner, and he settled that Isabel and himself would drive over to Chesham Court

afterwards, and offer their sympathy when the worst was over; and after all, perhaps, that was the thing most needed at such a moment.

Stanley Harrington mentally resolved he would make no more acquaintances amongst racing men. This *esclandre* of Sir Reginald's had upset his equanimity entirely, and his honest good-natured soul was full of indignation at the way in which Sir Reginald had treated his unfortunate wife. "If he had been my brother, I think I should have shot him like a dog," he muttered to himself. "There must be some bad blood in the family somewhere. I do not believe he ever was a gentleman."

Robert Burton thought it was the saddest day he had ever seen when he stood in the drawing-room at Chesham Court, waiting for the coming of Lady Slade. Why had they selected him for this bitter task? Was there no friend, no near relation to whom the breaking of this terrible

news could be confided? Was there no one whom Lady Slade loved, who could have softened the blow with gentle sympathy? Why should he, of all beings in the world, have been deputed to be the bearer of evil tidings to the woman he so madly worshipped? to save whom from an hour's pain he would gladly have given his life. And yet a strange contentment mingled with his sorrow. If he could not save her from the trouble, he would at least soften it all he could; no one he felt could be so gentle, if he only dared. Not one unnecessary word, not one unnecessary pang, should wound the heart, already so deeply tortured.

As he stood musing, Lady Slade entered the room, leading her child by the hand. She was pale and very sad-looking, but there was a questioning eagerness in her eyes as she bowed her head to his respectful salutation.

Robert Burton stooped to caress the child, who, with a cry of gladness, had run

up to the steward directly he saw who it was—even that moment of respite was a relief.

“You wish to see me, Mr. Burton, on business, I think.”

“Yes, my lady. I am sorry to intrude upon you at such an inconvenient time” (it was just her dinner hour), “but my business admits of no alternative.”

“It must be very important then,” she said, with a faint smile. “Could it not have stood over until Sir Reginald’s return? He has gone away, but will be back again in a day or two. I scarcely like to interfere with his affairs.”

“This matter concerns your ladyship as well as Sir Reginald,” replied the steward, gravely.

“Concerns me?” she asked, in slight surprise. “Pray be seated, Mr. Burton. There is no necessity for you to stand.”

But the steward only bowed his thanks, and remained as he was.

The boy came softly to his mother’s side, and rested his arm upon her knee.

"Your ladyship is doubtless aware that Sir Reginald has been speculating on the turf lately, and has staked large sums of money upon his various horses?"

"Yes, yes; I know," she interrupted, wearily; "I suppose they have lost again, and he wants more money raised."

"I am afraid there would be some difficulty in raising all that Sir Reginald requires," replied the steward, sadly.

"But you can get him some? He has written to you? You have come for my advice?" Her wistful eyes were raised to his face in suppressed anxiety, she was evidently fearing something.

"Sir Reginald has not written to me, nor do I know his whereabouts."

Her hand instinctively caught hold of her child, whom she drew nearer to her side.

"But—but—you do not think, you have no reason to imagine he is ill?" she faltered, devouring his face with her eager questioning glances. "Mr. Burton, tell me the truth, have you come from Sir Reginald?"

"I have not come from Sir Reginald ; and to the best of my belief he is alive and well. Pardon me, but when have I ever told your ladyship ought save the truth ?"

"Pray forgive me, Mr. Burton," said Lady Slade, heaving a deep sigh of relief ; "my anxiety and agitation made me I fear rude to you ; go on with your business, sir, I am all attention." She stroked her boy's golden head tenderly and lovingly, stooping down and kissing the fair youthful brow ; so that her husband was safe, she cared little what other news he brought.

Robert Burton scarcely knew how to commence, so calm she was, and so unsuspecting. "My lady," he said, gently but firmly, "have you never thought that Sir Reginald's extravagances might bring on other consequences injurious to yourself ?"

A deep flush suffused her face. "I am not in the habit," she said, proudly, "of questioning Sir Reginald's deeds or misdeeds. Have you come here to-night,

Mr. Burton, to argue my husband's right to act as he pleases? if so, your mission is indeed a fruitless one." She was angry now, yet would not show all she felt to the rescuer of her child, had it been anyone else she would have left the room in silence.

Robert Burton's agitation increased. "God forbid," he said, earnestly; "whatever I might think, it would ill become me to condemn my master's actions to his wife. It is not of his faults, but of their consequences that I come to speak—consequences that affect you and your son."

Ah! she was standing now white as ashes, one hand upon the back of her chair, the other tightly clasping her boy's little hand. "What is it you have come to tell me, Mr. Burton? What is it that affects my child?"

The steward lowered his head in sorrowful shame. "I wish I could spare you," he muttered, half to himself, but she caught the words.

"Spare yourself the trouble of useless regrets," she cried, proudly, "I trust I shall be able to bear it whatever it is. Why are you keeping me in this dreadful suspense? I desire to know your errand, sir."

He saw it had come, that the worst must be told and without evasion; her clear searching eyes would discover deception, however slight. "My lady," he said, and his voice had a passion of tears in it, "angry or not, believe me, I would have died to have saved you this bitter pain, but you must know the truth: Sir Reginald, I fear, is ruined!"

"Ruined!"

She sank back into the soft arm-chair, her lips quivering, her eyes rivetted on the steward's face; what could he do but gaze back in sad and sorrowful silence? his sympathetic looks told all the rest.

"Do I comprehend you aright, Mr. Burton?" she faltered, after a pause, "or am I dreaming? Is it so bad as that?"

"I fear it is, my lady. Sir Reginald, I

am told, has fled to France, but the crisis cannot be averted.”

She bowed her head over the child's soft white neck, her brown hair resting on his golden curls. “Oh, my darling! my darling!” It was the mother's cry of unutterable pain; no thought of self, no word of reproach for the man who had brought such ruin upon her—the child, always the child.

Little Francis, who had been regarding both his mother and Mr. Burton in silent astonishment, now cast his chubby arms round his mother's neck.

“Don't cry, mamma! send Burton away. Naughty Burton to make mamma cry.”

Lady Slade covered him with kisses. “Hush, dear!” she said, “it is not Mr. Burton's fault.” Then raising her head, pale but perfectly resolute, “Tell me all,” she cried, “let me know the worst. There is no agony like the agony of suspense.”

The steward placed before her, as clearly as he could, his statement of Sir Reginald's affairs, winding up with the last mad act of

the Baronet in staking all he possessed in the world on the black mare, whose failure brought matters to this terrible termination. Not that success, however great, would have had any other result. The gambler's downward progress was certain and inevitable; success in one instance would have spurred him on to other reckless ventures, some of which must, as now, have been fatal in the end.

Lady Slade heard Mr. Burton's statement in painful silence ; no expression, save the sudden flushing and pallor of her face, the convulsive pressure of her child to her heart, escaping her till all was concluded. The sincere sorrow, the deep sympathy conveyed in the tones of the steward's voice, fell almost unheeded on her ear. She had but one thought ; the ruin of her boy. When the steward had concluded, she rose slowly from her chair and held out her hand : " Thank you," she said, " I think I understand it all now. I have but a poor knowledge of business, but I fancy I comprehend this."

She tottered as she spoke, and would have fallen, but Mr. Burton caught her by the arm. "Lady Slade, Lady Slade, you are ill! shall I ring for assistance? shall I get you some wine?"

She shook her head with a wan sickly smile. "No, no; do not bring any one here, I shall be better presently," she gasped, pressing her hand on her left side. "Mr. Burton, have you anything more to say?"

The steward looked at her in agony, large drops of perspiration standing on his forehead. How should he tell her that her very house was no longer her own: that she must leave; that in every part of Chesham Court there was that terrible spectre: "a man in possession"?

"My lady," he said, "would it not be advisable for you to leave here as soon as you possibly can? I do not know your ladyship's arrangements; but I would suggest if you went to your friends——"

"Mr. Burton, are you mad?" gazing on him in wild astonishment—"leave here—

leave Chesham Court ? What should I do that for ?”

“ Dear lady,” he said, sadly, “ do you not understand Chesham Court is no longer yours, but the property of your husband’s creditors ?”

She staggered back, she had never anticipated this. In her ignorance of business matters, she had supposed that poverty meant loss of money, of luxuries, of all she had hitherto been accustomed to ; but that her home should be taken from her, that the broad lands she had so long looked upon as her child’s undisputed inheritance, should be no longer so, she had never for a moment contemplated. She pressed her hands wearily to her forehead. “ I think I am going mad,” she said, with a quick gasping sob. “ Mr. Burton, do you mean that we are beggars ?”

“ Oh, I hope not, not so bad as that,” clutching eagerly at a straw ; “ something I hope may be saved from the estate, when the affairs are wound up.”

"But that we have no longer any right to remain here? that these chairs, these tables, are not ours, but another's; that the name of which I have hitherto been so proud, is a bye-word, a disgrace, and my boy's inheritance a myth?" She questioned him rapidly, her dark eyes so full of anguish, so pitiful to see.

Robert Burton thought his heart would break. "Oh, madam," he said, gently and kindly.

Lady Slade took her child by the hand, "Come, Francis," she said, "we must be going now. Good night, Mr. Burton, I thank you for the kind and considerate manner in which you have told me this. To-night I must think, and to-morrow—to-morrow, I will go——"

"Where to, my lady!" exclaimed the steward, surprised in his anxiety about her welfare, into temporary forgetfulness of his position.

"To France, to Sir Reginald!" she cried. "Where should a wife's place be when her husband is in trouble, but by his side?"

The steward drew back to let her pass, respect and admiration in his eyes, when the door suddenly opened, and Stanley Harrington, Plantagenet Jones, Baxter the lawyer, and Catherine Hyde, entered the room.

Catherine, pale as a ghost, swiftly and silently crossed to where Beatrice stood, planting herself by her side, while on the countenances of the men a troubled horror was plainly visible. Beatrice gazed from one to another in speechless astonishment. "Mr. Harrington ! what is the matter ?" at last she stammered. "What have you come to tell me ?"

Stanley took hold of her hand, "Dear Lady Slade, do not be alarmed, Sir Reginald has met with an—accident."

"My husband—Reginald ?" exclaimed the terror-stricken wife. "Oh, where is he ? let me go to him at once."

"Calm yourself, dear Lady Slade," said the young senator, gently, "You could not go to-night you know, he is so far from

here ; pray sit down, we have come to talk over with you what is best to be done."

Beatrice clasped her hands wildly, " Sit down, when Reginald is ill, perhaps dying!"

Catherine Hyde passed her arm round her sister's waist, her strong yet loving grasp seemed to give the trembling wife support.

" Have courage, dearest Beatrice !" she whispered ; " put your trust in God." Something in the tones of her voice, something in the nervous hesitation of Stanley Harrington, excited Beatrice's suspicions.

" You are not telling me the truth, you are deceiving me !" she exclaimed, gazing from one to another, " Sir Reginald is dead ! Why do you not speak ? Stanley ! you have always professed to be my friend. What are you keeping back from me now ? I am sure something dreadful has happened ! do tell me what it is, that I may know the worst." She caught hold of his arm, while Plantagenet Jones and Mr. Baxter looked mournfully and significantly at each other.

" Do compose yourself, Beatrice," said

Stanley, kindly ; “ we will tell you all we know. A telegram has just arrived, saying Sir Reginald has met with a serious accident. We have not got the full particulars, perhaps another telegram may bring a better account.”

“ It cannot !” she cried hysterically, “ you know it cannot ! Oh, Stanley Harrington, it is not the truth.”

“ It is *not* the truth ! Beatrice,” echoed the clear passionate tones of Isabel Harrington, as, suddenly advancing into the middle of the room, she confronted the wife, her eyes flashing with unnatural brilliancy ; her countenance more like that of a demon, than a woman,—“ Sir Reginald was found dead this morning in a Paris hotel, *shot by his own hand !*”

“ Oh, look ! Isabel, you have killed her,” cried the terrified Stanley, as Lady Slade swayed to and fro, and then without a word, without a cry, sank senseless at his feet.

“ Mamma—mamma, oh, dear mamma !” uttered the little child in piercing tones.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE FEVER.

THE fever—oh, the cruel burning fever ! For weeks the wretched Lady Slade lay unconscious on a bed, that was daily expected to be one of death.

For weeks her sister and the nurses watched in agony each change of the hapless sufferer, expecting every moment would be her last. But youth and a strong healthy constitution prevailed over death, and Beatrice came back to life and to sorrow.

Every creature of God is sent for our good, if we did but know it, and there was infinite mercy, infinite love, in the Hand that struck down the unhappy Beatrice at

the moment when the culmination of misery might have affected her reason for life. It is not after all the patient who suffers the most : we listen in anguish to the delirious ravings ; we gaze upon the hot flushed face, the fevered lips, the sleepless eyes, our tears drop silently upon that helpless prostrate form, but the sufferer feels comparatively nothing, Terrible as it is to us, she remains unconscious of the burning heat we think so dreadful. She never hears the mad wild words uttered by her own parched lips ; it is the heart of the watcher that has the real fever—the fever of anguish and suspense.

Lady Slade came slowly and gradually back to life ; but it was long after she recovered her consciousness, before she appeared to have the slightest remembrance of the events that had happened previous to her illness. She lay, helpless, weak and utterly prostrate upon her bed, never moving, scarcely ever speaking ; only a gentle pressure of her hand, a faint smile

upon her lips, telling she knew and appreciated the kindness of those who attended her.

Even of her child she scarcely took any notice. The boy would be led to his mother's bedside, and she would put out her thin wasted fingers to stroke his golden hair, and look at him for a moment in a manner that was quite pitiful to see, and then she would motion his nurses to take him away. The very sight of him was too much for her feeble nerves to bear.

The doctors had positively forbidden anyone except Catherine Hyde, and the appointed nurses, to enter the patient's bed-room ; it was as much as her life was worth, they said, that her mind should not be disturbed ; and no one, who was in any way likely to recall to her memory any of the painful scenes through which she had passed, was to be permitted to cross the threshold of her door. The doctors were imperative in this, and therefore Miss Hyde engaged strangers both as nurses and attendants.

Catherine was totally unused to illness, but she found an admirable co-adjutor in the person of Mrs. Burton, who, the moment she heard from her son of Lady Slade's illness, hurried up to Chesham Court and offered her services, which were gratefully accepted by the distressed and bewildered Catherine.

And valuable they proved to be ; never seemingly wearied, never tired ; she sat up, night after night, with her patient ; never taking off her clothes, and scarcely allowing herself an hour's rest at a time, till the crisis had passed. Her motherly ways, her useful experience, the decision and precision which she ordered and directed everything in the sick room, were matters of surprise and admiration to Catherine Hyde, who soon left the entire management to Mrs. Burton.

Beatrice herself seemed to recognise something different in the manner and touch of the warm-hearted old lady, and would take her food more readily from the

hand of the kind and motherly Mrs. Burton, who treated her as if she were a little child of her own. Beatrice would lay and watch the quaint old-fashioned little woman as she moved rapidly and noiselessly about the room, or arranged the pillows of the invalid's bed ; a perplexed expression would flit across her face as she was evidently trying to remember where she could have seen her attentive nurse before. She would press her wasted hands to her forehead as if to collect her thoughts, and then a soft smile would pass over her wan face, and she would lay back in the warm loving arms of her nurse with a sigh of contentment and relief.

Poor Catherine suffered severely.

While her sister lay unconscious on her bed of sickness, the proud girl's heart was torn in twain with terror lest Beatrice should die, and the realization of their unfortunate state. From the exalted position they had so recently filled she saw they had fallen by a cruel and unexpected blow ; utterly ruined, nothing but poverty and disgrace

staring them in the face; for though the unconscious victims of his wickedness and folly, the shame of the Baronet's fraudulent transactions, the dishonour of his death, must cling to them wherever they went.

To a haughty sensitive girl like Catherine Hyde, the blow came with double force. Where was her pride? her lofty aspirations now? humbled to the dust! They were living now on charity—her sister's illness, the doctors' bills, even the very bread they ate, was at the expense of others, for they had nothing of their own. In every part of the house she met a man, whose presence alone reminded her of their destitute and miserable position; whose watchful eyes seemed to regard her with doubt and suspicion.

Though all the country round sent to enquire after Lady Slade's health, and letter after letter of earnest commiseration was sent to the unhappy sisters, Catherine closed the doors to all comers, no one but the Rev. Adrian Hope being admitted to the precincts of the Court.

There is a vulgar proverb, yet, nevertheless, a very true one, "That it is an ill wind that blows nobody good;" this was more than correct in the case of Catherine Hyde, for, unhappy as she was, so weak is human nature, that, supposing death should not be the result, Catherine was almost glad of Beatrice's illness, since it brought the young minister nearly every day to the house, and gave her hour after hour of converse with him.

Oh, those sad dreamy delicious hours! never in after years did Catherine forget the time that was so miserable, yet so happy; so heartrending, and yet so sweet.

Alone with him in that great dark wilderness of a house, where the drawn down blinds, the mournful looks of the servants, told that one death had been, and another was likely to follow.

Alone with him—the only man she had ever loved—listening to his tender words, gazing tremblingly into his dark eyes, being comforted as he alone could comfort; he

who came from God with God's message to her suffering soul, and in whose voice rang the sweet cords of a human love, touched by the hand of hope. Alone with him! no one to blame, no envious eyes to watch and spy! no cruel voice to tell her how wrong she did! His holy smile to cheer her in the weary anxious days; his blessing to comfort her in the long, long hours of the night.

She no longer missed the society to which she had been accustomed; she would sit for hours by Beatrice's bedside, never caring to utter a word—her heart was so busy with the sweet secret it held.

Still Adrian never spoke of love, and Catherine, who thought she comprehended his motives, admired him all the more for his delicate reticence.

That the change in her position would possibly make any difference in him, she never for a moment thought, and in this she did the young clergyman justice; the very fact that the woman he loved was

penniless and dependent, would have been but an additional reason to him for his claiming the right to help and protect her.

Catherine grieved for the loss of wealth and position, but she judged his heart by her own, and she knew no poverty or dishonour that could prevent her sharing her all with him had he been placed in similar circumstances. She felt certain he was only waiting for Beatrice's recovery to speak the words she so longed to hear. Poor Catherine, poor deluded girl !

Could she but have followed the young clergyman to his home, and witnessed the hours of torture and agony he passed before his crucifix after he had left her presence, how different her thoughts would have been ! She would have known then that those sweet interviews which afforded her such delicious pleasure, were but so many barriers to separate her lover from her ; so many additional reasons for their future parting. She would have known then that the reason Adrian came so often and stayed so long was simply

because he feared every day would be his last, and it was a species of mad infatuation that induced him to drink to the dregs the cup of poisoned pleasure he was soon to dash from his lips; for stronger and stronger as grew his love for Catherine, so stronger and stronger grew the instinct to fly.

It was only the illness of Lady Slade, and the unprotected state of both the sisters, that prevented him from at once putting his resolution into practice. He hesitated to leave while Beatrice hovered betwixt life and death, while Catherine was uncertain as to her future movements.

He knew full well that the beautiful Miss Hyde would be a welcome guest in many a noble home, but he determined to make one more effort to secure her for the religious sisterhood that he had established in the town. After that his course was clear.

Far across the sea had come tidings of the religious persecutions in China and the Corea, and the heart of the young

minister of God burned within him, to add his name to the list of Christian martyrs in that heathen land. Death ! Such a death as that would be a fitting and acceptable penance for his fancied sin.

About a week after Lady Slade was attacked with fever, Catherine Hyde, crossing the gallery to her own apartments, was informed by a maid servant that a lady was waiting to see her in the drawing-room. The servant was a new arrival, and, not aware of Catherine's prohibition regarding visitors, had told the stranger Miss Hyde was at home.

Catherine felt annoyed, but as, in this time of anxiety and trouble, she had been consulted, both by the lawyers and Mr. Burton, on matters which were absolutely necessary to be decided for Lady Slade, she fancied this lady, whosoever she might be, might have something to communicate which could only be told to one of the family. So she went down to the now

deserted room, into which the dusk of evening was already stealing, and there found a lady, closely veiled, her head bowed in her hands, sobbing bitterly.

At Catherine's approach she looked up and raised her veil. With a faint cry of surprise, Miss Hyde started back, for Rosamond Etheridge, pale, her eyes swollen with tears, was standing before her.

"Oh! Miss Hyde, is she better? Is there any hope?" The clasped hands, the pleading voice, told how deeply the speaker felt; but Catherine did not answer her question.

"Unhappy girl!" she said coldly. "Why have you ventured here?"

"To see Beatrice; to speak to her, if possible; to beg of her to forgive me!" sobbed the weeping Rosamond.

"Ask God to forgive you, human forgiveness is but of little avail when the sin is against His awful Majesty. Beg pardon of God, Rosamond Etheridge, for it is He, not man, whom you have offended."

Rosamond started and coloured.

"I have! I have! but I want to hear Beatrice say so too. I must see her, Catherine! she cannot die till I have told her all the truth."

"Must! cannot! Do you know of what, and to whom you are speaking? Do you know that Lady Slade is hanging on the very verge of death, and that I am forbidden to allow any one to approach her?"

"Oh, not me! not me!" entreated the agitated Rosamond. "I was her friend,—her little sister, she used to call me. I love her so dearly, and I know she loves me. I will be so quiet, so still and gentle, Miss Hyde. Only let me look upon her face once more,—the dear face that was always so kind to me!"

"And well you have repaid it for its kindness. Don't talk such absurdity to me! What have you cared for her or her feelings, all these past months? What do you care for any one's feelings? You had better go home to your unhappy mother, Rosamond, and not intrude upon a grief you cannot understand."

Rosamond bit her lips in suppressed anger, but controlled the expression that rose to them.

"Not understand!" she said bitterly; "I understand more than you imagine, Miss Hyde. Do let me see her!" she continued with passionate earnestness. "I have come so far,—and at such a risk——"

But Catherine drew back from the trembling hands that would have clutched her dress, unmistakable disgust and horror pictured on her face.

"Don't touch me!" she exclaimed; "don't dare to touch me! I wonder how you ever dared come here at all!"

Even at that moment, when the pure soul of Catherine Hyde recoiled before the woman who she felt sure was stained with sin, she observed that Rosamond was richly and expensively attired, and, but for the traces of tears upon her face, handsomer than ever.

The sight maddened and irritated her. It was bad enough for the girl to force herself into the house over which she had

cast a reflex of her shame, but that she should flaunt the produce of her guilt before her very eyes was a depravity impossible to understand.

Rosamond caught the horror in her face, and smiled proudly.

"How dare I come!" she repeated. "I dare do anything to see my darling once again. Aye, even seek an interview with you, Miss Hyde."

She was brazen in her guilt, this girl.

Catherine shuddered visibly.

"Your errand is a fruitless one," she said coldly; "the doctors have forbidden any one to see Lady Slade, and I mean to see that their instructions are obeyed."

"You cannot be so cruel!" cried Rosamond, wringing her hands. "I always thought you had no heart; but surely your religion must teach you to pity those who have. If Beatrice is so ill, my presence cannot harm her. I will only look upon her face and go away."

See! I will be calm; I will not even cry. Do let me kiss her hand once more!"

"You kiss her hand! *You!* Rosamond Etheridge,—the pure soul of my sister hovers between life and death, and the angels that are to bear her to heaven may be already in her room. Do you think I would allow *you* to pollute that sacred chamber with your presence, the sanctity of that innocent death bed by *your* touch? Have you forgotten what you are?"

Rosamond, flushing deeply, gazed bewildered on Catherine's pure indignant face.

"Forgotten what I am," she murmured. "No, I remember it every hour of my life."

"And yet it has no effect upon you? You come here dressed in this style, with those jewels, to trouble the death-bed of the woman who was once your friend."

"The woman who was once?—the woman who shall always be my friend!" exclaimed Rosamond, in passionate excite-

ment. "What have I done that I should forfeit her esteem, save what she will generously forgive me when she knows the truth? I owe you no explanation, Miss Hyde. I seek no forgiveness from you. There never was any great love between us, and it is too late in the day to expect it now."

Catherine was more and more astounded at her visitor's audacity. What had she done? God forbid she should sully her pure lips by letting the foul words escape them.

"I leave it to your conscience, if you have any left, to know what you have done. You will excuse me if I intimate our interview is at an end."

With a glance of proud reproof she moved towards the bell, but Rosamond did not mean to be dismissed like this.

"Oh! do not send me away, Miss Hyde—Catherine," she pleaded. "Do not tell me that I may not see her! If I have been rude to you, I pray you to forgive me. I

was always wilful and impetuous in the old days, you know. Let me see Beatrice, my friend, my poor dying darling ; let me see her for a minute—only a minute. See, Catherine, I entreat you on my bended knees ; and I will bless you, and pray for you.”

Catherine drew her dress away from the trembling clinging hands.

“ Pray for yourself, you poor misguided girl,” she said ; and her voice, though firm, had a touch of tenderness in it. “ Go and ask pardon of God and your mother, for the sin and shame that lie at your door—for the sorrow that you have brought on all who loved you. Ask me no more ; with my consent you shall never see my sister again.”

Rosamond sprang to her feet, a burning blush suffusing face and neck, her eyes flashing with indignation.

“ Take back your words, Miss Hyde,” she exclaimed. “ I am as pure as you are—aye, and purer ; for the soul that has

never known a temptation can boast of no victory gained. I will see Beatrice, and before long too. Something tells me she will not die, and then your consent will be a matter of little consequence. I would not have your cold and stony heart, proud girl, for all the gold that glitters. Pure you may be and proud you are ; but so was Lucifer before his fall."

Before the astounded Catherine could reply, Rosamond had left the room, leaving Catherine with a strange uneasy feeling at her heart.

In her purity and maidenly horror of sin, Catherine Hyde had naturally shrunk from touching a girl so fallen as she deemed Rosamond Etheridge to be ; and at the same time she was simply obeying the physicians by keeping all visitors from the chamber of sickness. Still there was something in Rosamond's manner that was strangely inconsistent with a guilty conscience, and disturbed Catherine's sense of having simply done her duty. The

thought would come in spite of all her efforts to banish it, that if she had not been quite so harsh, she might have won from the offender an acknowledgment of the truth. Oh ! had she but sent for Adrian Hope, she might have kept Rosamond under some pretence until he arrived, but now she had driven her coldly from the house, and sent her back—to what ?

Rosamond, in a passion of angry tears, wended her way to where, under the shadow of the trees, a dark brougham was awaiting her arrival. The footman jumped down from the box, and opened the door for his mistress, when a lady, evidently out for an evening stroll, came up the footpath where Rosamond was standing. It was not easy to mistake the lithe graceful figure, the undulating sweep of those shimmering silken garments. Simultaneously the two women recognized each other, and as Rosamond in the first impulse of surprise held out her hand, Mrs. Harrington

stopped, stared, and then with a laugh, the insolence of which caused the blood again to flush to Rosamond's temples, gathered up her skirts with a significant gesture, and passed on her way. The next morning Rubestown had a fresh cause for astonishment and talk, for Fern Cottage was shut up, and Mrs. Etheridge, like her daughter, had gone, and left no sign !

CHAPTER VII.

CATHERINE'S TEMPTATION.

CATHERINE HYDE was troubled and distressed. As she feared he would, the Rev. Adrian Hope blamed her severely, though gently, for her conduct to the unfortunate Rosamond.

"It was not Christ's way," he said, "to repulse the sinner with coldness and reproaches. Who knew but the sight of the dying Beatrice might not have completed the conversion of a girl, whose repentance was already evinced by her sighs and tears? There was a mystery in it all he could not comprehend; he could not believe in Rosamond's actual guilt. The very fact of her desire to see her former benefactress

seemed to prove the girl was not hopelessly bad."

Catherine was pained and troubled by all this. Under her proud reserve she had a woman's heart ; and her anger for the sinner had almost evaporated before she had left the house. But it was too late now—it was impossible to find her. She could only hope Rosamond would fulfil her threat, and return to Chesham Court soon. She would try and make amends for her harshness to her then.

Amongst the many duties that devolved upon her now, Catherine Hyde had frequently to see the steward on business ; and from him she learnt that Plantagenet Jones was the late Sir Reginald's principal creditor, and held most of the mortgages on the estate. Utterly ignorant as she was of money matters, the surprise she felt that he, who had so frequently professed to be their greatest friend, was now their bitterest persecutor, was coupled with the remembrance that the banker and M.P. was enor-

mously wealthy, and always expressed an intense admiration for herself ; and an idea which, quixotic as it was, took possession of her mind and imagination, gave her no rest until she was able to put it into execution.

Refusing herself to everyone, she had never seen any of the Jones' family, since the news of Sir Reginald's suicide reached the Court. Miss Archer and the girls had called repeatedly, and sent abundance of fruit and other delicacies for the use of the hapless invalid, but Catherine had persisted in her determination to see neither them nor anyone else.

However, when Beatrice became so convalescent that she could be left in safety, Catherine Hyde, to the astonishment of the household, who had never seen her leave the grounds during her sister's illness, ordered the close carriage and drove to the Rubestown bank. She was quickly admitted to the magnificent presence of the great Plantagenet, who had only the day before

returned from London, where he had been on Parliamentary business. His surprise was only equalled by his delight. He led the beautiful mourner to a chair, and seating himself by her side, gave vent to his satisfaction in a series of enthusiastic remarks. "It was so seldom a lady ever entered that room; her presence was like a gleam of sunshine." Almost the last occasion had been two years before, when his own sister sat in the very seat he had placed for Catherine Hyde, pleading for a few pounds to save her and her children from want.

Did a remembrance of that painful scene flit across the banker's mind? If so, at all events he did not show it. Beneath his assumption of respectful condolence, there was a proud smile lurking at the corners of his mouth, lighting up his eyes. He gazed upon his lovely visitor much as a monster spider might have done, when he saw some brilliant helpless fly safe in the meshes of his web.

Catherine was too intent upon her mission to notice either him or his looks.

"You are surprised, no doubt, Mr. Jones, to see me here to-day?"

"Surprised and charmed; but before I inquire to what am I indebted for this unexpected pleasure, allow me to ask how Lady Beatrice is?"

"She is much better, thank God; it will not be long now before she can be removed."

She spoke warmly, almost bitterly, but the banker did not appear to notice it.

"You have had a terrible time of it lately, Miss Hyde; you do not know how deeply I have felt, how my heart has ached for both of you."

Catherine raised her eyes and looked at him curiously; if he were speaking the truth, so much the better for her cause.

The banker looked thoughtful. "Yes, believe me or not, no one could possibly regret this wretched business more than I do myself. Slade's conduct has been most

heartless and unfeeling, but he has gone to his account, and I have no wish to sit in judgment on him ; the worst of it is, he has placed me in a position I never ought to have been in, I mean in respect to you and your sister."

"It is exactly about that position I have come to speak," said Catherine, a faint colour stealing over her beautiful face. "I have heard——Mr. Burton tells me——you are the principal creditor to Sir Reginald's estate."

"D—n Burton!" muttered Plantagenet, under his breath; but he replied in a deprecating manner, "That is, unfortunately, the case. Never was man placed in a more unpleasant predicament than I am ; trying to do a kind act to save a friend, I find myself regarded as the robber of his family."

"Scarcely that ; neither Beatrice nor myself hold you in any way to blame for the past. You have always been a kind friend to us, Mr. Jones, till lately," and the tears rushed into the lovely proud eyes.

"And always will be!" he exclaimed, emphatically; "that is, if you will allow me to be so. Believe me, Miss Hyde, there is nothing that I can do that I would not do for your sister and yourself."

Catherine smiled gratefully up at him. "You are very good," she said, and then the tears again obscured her sight.

"There, there! don't cry! you have only to command me." Plantagenet looked admiringly at her. She was more than usually lovely to-day, the heavy black dress she wore setting off the exquisite fairness of her complexion, her long crape veil just resting on her golden hair.

"If you are the principal creditor," she asked, inquiringly, "it rests with you, does it not, whether the estate has to be sold or not?"

"Not exactly; there are others to whom Sir Reginald was almost as deeply indebted as to myself. Had I not foreclosed, they would, and in all probability have taken the lion's share. I have done what I have in order to prevent this being the case."

Catherine sighed. "I thought," she said, wistfully, "that if you did not press your claim, the others might be induced to wait."

The banker smiled. "My dear young lady," he cried, "you are a very baby in matters of business, in fact, it was never intended your charming sex should know anything about it ; women were only meant to look angelic and be admired. You have no idea of the rapacity of these rascally Jews ; it is entirely owing to my intervention that they have not sold up everything long ago, even when Lady Slade was so ill."

"Then there is no hope of saving the estate ?"

"None, not the slightest, I fear ; but why do you care ? If it were possible, (which it is not), it is so heavily encumbered, it would be years before it was free. Lady Beatrice will be well rid of a great responsibility, and her boy, if he lives, must make a name and estate for himself."

"It was not for myself that I was speaking," said Catherine, earnestly, "but for Beatrice's sake; her whole soul was bent on seeing Francis lord of his rightful inheritance. It will break her heart, I think, if she has to leave Chesham Court."

"Nonsense! nonsense!" cried Plantagenet, "your sister must give up such childish ideas; when she gets well and strong again, she will think very differently. A new place is worth fifty old ones to my mind any day. Why, I might have bought almost any estate I liked before I got Bingley; but I preferred to build for myself, none of your old knock-'em-down rattle-traps for P. J.! As for ancestry, see what ancestry has done for Sir Reginald; he had far better have kept his money."

A faint sneer curled Catherine's proud red lips, but it was not her policy to quarrel with the banker. "Beatrice would not mind how poor she was, could she but retain Chesham Court"—she pleaded,—“the creditors might take all the money, leaving her just

a trifle to live on. "Oh! Mr. Jones, you are rich—you are good—you are generous. Could you not suggest some means by which this terrible ruin could be averted?"

Plantagenet slightly frowned, she was pushing him rather too hard. "My dear Miss Catherine," he said, "you are asking impossibilities. I said just now, there is nothing that I can do, that I would not do to serve you and your sister; but this I cannot do. Why, you are in other words, proposing not only for me to waive my claim, but also to pay off all the other mortgages. It is utterly out of the question."

Catherine saw the hopelessness of it now; she rose and bowed her graceful head. "Forgive me, Mr. Jones," she said, "I am, as you say, a perfect child in matters of business. I never knew what trouble was before. Poor Beatrice," she murmured sadly, "I would have saved her if I could." She held out her hand, as if to take leave, but the banker, whose heart was filled with secret joy, in spite of

his commiserating countenance, did not intend to let her go just then.

"Sit down, sit down," he cried, fussing round her, "you women are always in such a terrible hurry ; let me think a bit." He walked up and down the room several times, turning his head from her, that she might not see the smiles that would ripple over his face. Catherine watched and waited, alternate hope and despair fluctuating at her heart. At last he drew a chair quite close to her, and took hold of her hand. "You appear to love your sister very dearly, Miss Hyde."

"I have reason to love her," was the quick reply.

"And if I heard your whisper aright, you would do anything to save her."

"Indeed I would, Mr. Jones," she burst out, eagerly. "Oh, tell me if there is any chance?"

Some wild hope—that in some way, she did not exactly know how, she might be able to redeem the coveted estate, flashed

across her mind ; in her eagerness she laid her hand upon his arm.

The banker shot a penetrating glance at her mobile face, while a burning flush mounted to his own, he lowered his voice almost to a whisper. "There *is* one way—one only way."

"And that?"

"Marry me—be my wife. Oh, my beautiful one, you cannot be ignorant how long and devotedly I have loved you. Only consent to be mine, and not only Chesham Court, but all I possess in the world, shall be yours, to bestow on whom you will."

With a cry, Catherine Hyde started to her feet, crimson blushes covering her face.

Plantagenet pressed his suit, heedless of her agitation. "I am a little rough, I am premature, and did not mean to say a word of this, till all had passed over; but you have forced the secret from me, by your powerful pleading. What is there that I can re-

fuse you, Catherine? Speak to me darling, say you will be mine."

Catherine was sobbing bitterly. He endeavoured to take her hand, but she withdrew it, flashing on him a proud indignant glance. "Mr. Jones, how dare you?" was all she could utter.

"How dare I, sweet? I dare anything that could help to make you mine. I know full well that I am too precipitate in this; but how could I resist that gentle voice, those eloquent eyes? He smiled at her as he spoke, putting on one of his most fascinating looks.

"What have I done? What have I said, that you should speak to me like this?" sobbed the angry Catherine. "It is almost an insult in my bitter tronble."

"Insult you!—I insult you! nothing, believe me, was farther from my thoughts. I would kill the man if I knew him who would dare to offer you an insult. I know I am no longer young, lovely Catherine; but money makes up for lack of youth. You are a

clever and sensible woman, and have a soul above the usual frivolity of your sex. I will be all the most exacting mistress can require. My life and my possessions are laid at your feet."

Catherine buried her face in her hands. How should she answer this man, whose coarse vulgarity shocked her every sense of refinement.

"Catherine," he whispered, as his hot breath fanned her cheek, "you are beautiful, and you are proud. Your beauty requires dress—your pride, position. I can give you both. I will shower gold and jewels upon you: no lady in the land shall hold her head higher than the wife of Plantagenet Jones. As for your fine aristocrats, I can buy and sell them all—they are glad enough to hobnob with me—Plantagenet Jones, banker and member for Rubestown."

Catherine shuddered; the image of her refined and saintly lover rose between her and this vulgar *parvenu*.

"Don't say any more—don't, please," she said, "I am sure you wish to do me honour. I thank you, but I shall never marry anyone."

"Never marry!" he laughed: "all you girls say that, till they get the opportunity. Why, my pretty one, you are never dreaming of shutting yourself up in a nunnery, are you? I can tell you a trick worth two of that. Marry me, and you shall build half-a-dozen nunneries, and a dozen churches if you like, and you shall go and pray all day, and sing as many psalms as you please, except when I want you, and I'm afraid that will be always, my dear," and again he tried to look lovingly into her face.

A nunnery—a church—she wanted but one nunnery, Adrian's heart; but one church, where he was rector. The banker marked her ecstatic expression, and attributed it to his own powerful persuasion. "Think it over, I don't want your answer now. I fear you are flustered and distressed; take time for your decision. One

little word will bring me to your feet, at any moment you choose. Oh, you beautiful witch! see what you have already done, a smile from you has saved your sister."

Catherine clasped her hands—saved her sister! At what price? the ruin of her own happiness for life. Could she possibly do it? And Adrian's happiness also, if she read him aright, would be utterly destroyed. Would Beatrice wish it if she knew? No—a thousand times no! What she, Catherine Hyde, give up her love—her life—and for what? To become the bride of this vulgar *parvenu*, a man old enough to be her father; a man from whom her very nature shrank and recoiled; a man whom she secretly loathed and despised. Beatrice would never accept such a terrible sacrifice. She, Catherine, could never make it—ask her life—ask any thing, but renounce her lover—never!

"Mr. Jones," she said, turning towards the enamoured banker, quiet dignity struggling with disgust, "you are mistaken; much as I

desire it, I cannot purchase my sister's happiness at the price of my own self-respect. I do not—I cannot love you!”

“I don’t want your love,” he said bluntly: “I want you to leave me to win your affection in time; hang your self-respect! What’s self-respect when you have no tin? Beauty is all very well, but men look out for a little coin now-a-days. And as for rank, who would care to marry the sister of a——?”

“Don’t speak of the dead!” flashed out the indignant girl. “You cannot tell what he did not suffer before he took his life. Pray allow me to depart, Mr. Jones. I assure you it can never, never be!”

Plantagenet Jones stared confusedly at her, his round red face the very essence of perplexity. He had never meant it should come to this, and could have cut out his tongue for speaking to Catherine on this occasion. His plan of operations had been laid very skilfully. Once let Catherine and Beatrice be left without a home, he foresaw

little difficulty in persuading them to come to his. He could easily explain away his position in reference to the mortgages. Plantagenet was very generous when it suited him ; and, once make Catherine his wife, he was quite willing to purchase another estate for Beatrice and the boy.

His daughter Maria would shortly be married, Jane intended to become a Sister of Mercy ; and as for Miss Archer, she might go to Jericho for aught he cared. She should not stop there to annoy his beautiful Catherine.

He intended to come down to Chesham Court with the most generous offers of assistance, which, added to the persuasions of his girls, who dearly loved both Beatrice and Catherine, would, he had no doubt, induce them to make Bingley Towers their residence, at all events for a little while ; time and opportunity would do the rest. But now, by his premature confession, he had spoiled it all.

He could scarcely believe his senses.

Did he hear aright? She—Catherine Hyde—penniless and disgraced, dared to refuse him, to refuse the handsomest offer man ever made to woman,—refuse to save her sister and her child from being outcasts on the world. Was she mad, or was he dreaming? He was old, he knew, but he was not such a bad-looking fellow after all, and he was certain Catherine loved no other man. He had heard from his daughters of the way she rejected every suitor for her hand, and had had personal experience of the indifference she shewed to his attentions.

Her whole soul seemed devoted to the Church, a fact to which Plantagenet Jones had not the slightest objection, for, while it served to keep his wife amused, it would also keep her pure. Man of the world and sceptic as he was, he acknowledged the hallowing influence of religion in others.

“It was her maiden modesty that had been surprised by his sudden declaration of love. He had been too premature; he must give

her time for reflection. A few days' thought would soon alter the sentiments of the wilful beauty." So he took her hand tenderly, despite her efforts to prevent him, and the shudder with which she turned away.

"Dear Catherine, I do not intend to take your no. It was wrong of me to speak to you of love while still in such terrible grief. That deep black dress looks very unlike a marriage garment, I allow. Think over what I have said; think over all I offer: riches, a happy home, every luxury the heart of woman can desire. Think of the happiness you can give to others, the misery you will save; and," a happy thought striking him, "think of the good you can do, of the money you can give to the Church, of the souls you can save from sin and distress! Yes, Catherine, darling, think of the good you can do!"

Catherine listened to him in agony, varying emotions flitting over her eloquent face, never for an instant wavering in her

determination—never for an instant, supposing even if she did not love Adrian, she could possibly unite her life with this coarse, underbred man,—she could not but acknowledge the truth of all he stated, all that she might save, all the good she might do if she became his wife. Her torture was unbearable. Marry him! No; death would be preferable to such a life! She tore her hands from his detaining grasp.

“I cannot!” she cried; “I cannot!”

The banker let her go, a faint smile upon his lips. I have seen some cruel boys tie a string to the leg of a little bird, and after letting it hop so far, pull it suddenly back whenever it attempted to fly. An expression, similar to that of these infant Neros, crossed the jovial red face of the banker as he handed Catherine into her carriage.

CHAPTER VIII.

VICTORIOUS.

CATHERINE HYDE returned home, sad and dispirited, her interview with the opulent banker having been productive of nothing but the most unfortunate results. She had not only failed in her mission as regarded her sister, but had also been obliged to listen to his odious confessions of love. She felt certain she had done more harm than good, and was sure that when she sent her final answer to Plantagenet Jones, he would be so mortified and enraged that he would show them no mercy ; but, on the contrary, hasten on proceedings which she now learnt for the first time had rested with him to avert.

She was sad at heart, for she had done it all for the best ; and it was no little matter for the proud Catherine to humble herself to ask a favour of anyone. Even in this case it was not for herself, it was for Beatrice and the boy. Catherine would have starved rather than have begged such a boon from Plantagenet Jones.

However, there was no help for it now, they must all of them leave the Court soon ; but to go,—whither ? They had numerous invitations from kind friends who wrote and offered both home and change of scene for the invalid and her sister ; but Lady Slade was still too ill and weak to bear the fatigue of society, and Catherine shrank from the open sympathy which she knew would be expressed wherever they went.

Mr. Stanley Harrington had offered a temporary home again and again ; but Lady Slade, ever since the first night of her illness, seemed to have taken an inveterate dislike to her former friend, and would neither see her nor hear her name men-

tioned, and whenever that clever little lady was spoken of, it was sufficient to throw her into a dreadful state of agitation, from which she was with difficulty removed.

She persisted in declaring that Mrs. Harrington, she was sure, was secretly overjoyed at the news of Sir Reginald's death, and had spoken the truth about the telegram only to stab her to the heart.

In vain Catherine expostulated with her sister, and tried to reason her out of such nonsensical ideas. Much as she disliked Mrs. Harrington herself, she took her part in this case against her sister, and told her how deeply Mrs. Harrington was grieved when she found the effect her words had produced, and how assiduous she had been in her inquiries at the Court.

"Don't mention her, Catherine, don't say another word!" poor Beatrice would reply, with a shudder. "I will never see her again! her face haunts me now, it comes before me in my dreams; her dark wicked eyes terrify me to death. Don't talk of

her, Catherine, or I shall be ill again," and so Catherine was obliged to yield to what she judged was a phantasm of her sister's brain; but all idea of a home at the Harringtons' must be for ever at an end.

Lady Slade appeared to have fallen into a state of apathy painfully distressing to her friends; she no longer seemed to take the slightest interest in her affairs, but would sit for hours gazing, as it were, into vacancy, never speaking except when spoken to.

It was very pitiful to see her sad depression, and Catherine began to entertain serious doubts regarding her mind, when the physician assured her that it was but the natural result of the fever through which Lady Slade had passed, and she only needed change of air and scene to restore her to her former healthful condition. It was really necessary at times to ask her questions in reference to the estate, but when they did, she invariably referred them to Catherine, whom she empowered to settle all her affairs—

With the exception of her child, from whom she now again refused to be separated, and the Rev. Adrian Hope, Beatrice seemed to enjoy no society likê that of her kind and motherly nurse. She would scarcely ever allow Mrs. Burton out of her sight; she looked for her in the morning, the last thing at night, and during the day nothing was right unless Mrs. Burton did it—Mrs. Burton ordered it to be made. She would lie for hours with her hand in Mrs. Burton's, listening to the old lady's quaint stories, and one of her rare beautiful smiles was sure to ripple over her face as an odd expression, or fault in diction, fell from the nurse's lips.

There were times also when the stern religious views of Mrs. Burton were brought to bear on her wayward patient, whom she occasionally scolded like a little child for her want of resignation to the "Will of God."

Brought almost to the very verge of the grave, Beatrice saw life in a very different light to that in which she had hitherto

regarded it ; the light of another world seemed to have stolen across that fearful chasm, and touched the heart of the convalescent with a ray of its marvellous love. The pride, (for Beatrice Slade was proud,) which she had shewn in her days of prosperity, had all passed away, and she answered the humblest menial in her house with a sweet condescension that was unutterably pathetic.

It was on a beautiful afternoon that she lay half reclining on a soft couch that had been wheeled for her use near the open window, gazing mournfully on the Chesham woods, now tinged with a golden beauty by the rays of the setting sun, her child nestling by her side, her hand lying as usual in the warm clasp of Mrs. Burton's, when the steward craved an interview with his mistress, as he still chose to term the dis-crowned Lady Slade.

" Art thou well enough to see him, my dear ?" so familiarly did Mrs. Burton address her patient.

“ Oh, yes, let him come in. I am sorry Catherine is not here, but I dare say I shall do as well,” replied Lady Slade, with a sigh.

It was the first time that Mr. Burton had seen her since her illness.

If he thought her like his dead Lucy before, the resemblance was now so powerful and striking, that the steward started and turned pale as his eyes fell upon that delicate attenuated form, whose white face seemed whiter still from the snowy pillows that surrounded it.

Beatrice observed him start, and attributed it to her changed appearance. “ I am altered, am I not, Mr. Burton ?” she said, holding out her hand ; “ but thanks to God and my kind nurses, I have weathered the storm.”

“ I hope you will live to weather many a one, my Lady.”

“ Not like this, I trust,” she said sadly ; “ another like this would kill me.”

Mr. Burton did not reply, but wondered,

looking at her now, how she had ever rallied at all.

"I suppose you have come on business, Mr. Burton? it is not much that we can possibly have to transact together;" and her eyes again wandered to the old grey woods, to the crimson and gold of the setting sun.

"I fancy it is the last time I shall have to trouble your ladyship, but if you think you are not able to bear the fatigue to-day ——"

"I can bear anything now," interrupted Beatrice, with an "Oh, my dearie!" from Mrs. Burton.

"I have brought an account of my stewardship," smiled Robert Burton, "which, at some future time, I should like to lay before your ladyship for inspection; but the principal reason of my intrusion is, that I may know your wishes with regard to your removal from here, as I fear we cannot keep the wolves at bay much longer. May I ask where you intend to go?"

"I have never thought of it," sighed

Beatrice. "Oh! I do wish Catherine was here; she would decide for me."

"Nay, dear, Miss Hyde cannot possibly decide for thee, thou must choose for thyself; thou hast invitations and to spare from thy kind friends."

"I'll go to none of them," cried Beatrice hastily. "I should like to go away by myself—Francis and I—where no one could find us."

"Thou art ungrateful to God now for the mercies He has shewn thee."

Mr. Burton made motions to his mother to desist; he could not bear to hear his idol reproved. He would not have been astonished had Lady Slade quietly ordered her to leave the room. But on the contrary, she replied, submissively,—

"Yes, I am ungrateful to God and to you; but you know what I mean, Mrs. Burton. I would like to go away somewhere, where I could forget all this trouble; where no one could talk to me about it; '*Out of Society!*' out of the world!"

Her faithful friends gazed at her in sad pitying silence. They had both known in their humble way what it was to feel like that.

“If your ladyship could get away to some quiet place, where for a time you would be comparatively unknown, it would, I think, be the best thing for restoring your health and spirits. There is nothing like change of air for the body, nothing like change of scene for the mind; and when you are stronger, I would suggest travelling. You see, I am a bit of a doctor, Lady Slade. It is your nervous system that is unstrung.”

“Aye, my lady,” broke in Mrs. Burton, “Robert is a main good hand at doctoring; he would have made a rare good doctor if his father had given him the education; and as for physic——”

“Mother!” exclaimed Robert Burton in a warning voice; he was terrified lest Lady Slade should be annoyed by Mrs. Burton’s familiarity.

Beatrice laughed softly. “Travelling!

change of air ! My good Burton, have you taken leave of your senses ? Have you forgotten you are speaking to a penniless woman ? where am I to find the money for such things ? I am a beggar !”

“ Not quite, my lady,” said the steward, and his face crimsoned darkly. “ I find there is one hundred pounds a year which cannot be claimed by the mortgagees. Messrs. Baxter and Higgins will pay that sum to you half yearly on receipt of your cheque.”

Beatrice started up on her couch. “ One hundred pounds a year !” she exclaimed delightedly. “ Oh, that is quite a fortune ! Francis and I can go where we please, can we not, Francis ?”

“ To heaven, mamma ?” questioned the child, who had heard so much lately about his mother going to heaven, that he thought it not unlikely they would all go there too. He had been told to keep quiet, as his mother would soon be an angel with beautiful white wings, and would live in a glorious home all above the clouds,

where the tears would be all wiped away from her eyes, and she would never know pain or sorrow more ; and the boy, whose faith in his mother's love was so perfect, that he could not realize any place for her where he was not—listened with wondering eyes to the description of that perfect home, till he longed for the time to come when they would both go there together.

“ No, no, darling, not yet, in God's good time ; but somewhere, where Francis and mamma will get quite well.”

“ I thought you were going to heaven, mamma ? I think I should like to go to heaven best !”

His mother smiled and kissed him. She was full of her newly-acquired riches. To a woman who, a moment before, believed herself utterly penniless and dependent on the charity of others, even a hundred a year seemed a very large sum,—and Beatrice, who, since her marriage, had never known the value of money,—imagined she could live like a princess on what, ordinarily speaking, only kept her in gloves.

Mr. Burton smiled to witness her almost child-like delight.

“ Oh ! I wish Catherine were here ! How pleased she would be ! Dear Catherine, I must share it with her, of course. But where shall we go ? ” Then, as if a sudden thought had struck her, she turned to Mrs. Burton, “ What are you going to do ? Do you stay at the farm ? ”

Robert Burton answered for his mother. “ Certainly not, my lady. Thanks to the kindness I have received from your husband’s family, I am enabled to keep my mother now without work. I have taken a small place for her at Sunnyside on the western coast. My mother loves the sea, and it is but right that I should consult her wishes in this respect. As for myself, I shall most probably go abroad. ”

Lady Slade clasped her hands, a sudden feverish desire possessed her to go to the sea-side. “ The sea, ” she murmured softly ; “ the sea gives life and health. ” Then looking timidly at Mrs. Burton, said, “ Cannot I go there too ? ”

“Oh! my lady!” exclaimed the delighted woman. “Would’st thou honour me so far?”

“I am afraid I should be a great trouble to you.”

“Not a trouble, but a pleasure. Oh! my sweet lady, to think ye would condescend to mak my house your ladyship’s home; and Sir Francis also—it is too much honour.”

“My mother forgets,” said the steward, into whose eyes had stolen a sudden light, and over whose face a crimson flush was stealing, “that all we have had, and all we now possess, came from Chesham Court. It would only be just and right of us to lay at your ladyship’s feet, the emoluments gained in your ladyship’s service. If I might dare to offer such a thing, I beg of you to look upon any house of mine as your own, and my mother and myself as your devoted servants.”

Lady Slade stretched out a hand to each. “I look upon you both as my true and

faithful friends," she said, with her rare sweet smile. "Truly I ought to have lived in the feudal times. It is seldom one meets with such fidelity now-a-days."

A statement that was quite correct; the bailiff and butler, and other servants on the estate, having departed, after the instincts of their class, the moment they heard that their wages were not likely to be paid. But Robert Burton had a soul above his serfdom; and besides that, he adored the ground this woman trod on; this woman who was so like his poor little sweetheart, with her thin pale face and large melancholy-looking eyes.

When Catherine came in, the invalid was all anxiety to tell her the good news, and, with the restless impatience of a convalescent, urged her to make immediate preparations for their departure. "The sea! I am sure I shall be better when I am near the sea!" she cried, with wistful longing.

"I think you will," replied Catherine. "It is by far the best thing you can do."

Miss Hyde's haughty contempt for the steward and his mother had greatly evaporated during her sister's illness. Mrs. Burton's kindness and devotion had quite won her heart, and the frequent interviews she was obliged to have with Mr. Burton had shewn him to her in a new light. She had discovered that noble feelings, upright conduct, and a high sense of manly duty, could be hidden under a coat that was not made at Poole's. And she felt sure that her sister could have no sincerer or better adviser in her troubles than this man whom, three months before, she scarcely would have deigned to notice.

She was quite willing that Beatrice should for a while accept the steward's offer, as the hundred pounds, small as it was, would place her above any obligation; and she would have time to recruit her wasted health and strength by the side of the beautiful sea. Therefore she said again, with her arms round Beatrice's waist, "Yes, darling; it is the best thing you can do. I am glad you are going."

"But you will come too, Catherine? Won't you? You do not think I should keep a hundred a year all to myself? The money is amply sufficient for us both. My own dear sister shall have half of all I possess."

Catherine shook her head, and Lady Slade noticed for the first time that she was as white as ashes, and her eyes were swollen as though with weeping.

"Never mind me, Beatrice. God will take care of me. You need all you have for Francis and yourself. Do not let any thought of me add to your miseries. I am sure I shall not want."

"But—but," expostulated the surprised Beatrice, "I must think of you. Where will you go? What will you do without money? And alone—"

"I shall enter the Sisterhood of Mercy," said the girl, calmly, as, kissing her sister's forehead, she left the room.

This was what had decided her.

This was how it all came about.

Returning from her afternoon stroll in the grounds that day, she found the Rev. Adrian Hope waiting for her in the morning-room. She went to him, her beautiful face flushed with the exercise she had taken, conscious love shining out of her sweet proud eyes. She was very happy, for she had sent a positive refusal to Plantagenet Jones that morning, and was glad that she had another sacrifice to lay at her lover's feet. Not that she really considered it in a sacrificial light, but rather as a danger from which she had had a lucky escape. She was not ignorant that the banker's munificent offer would have been a great temptation to many high-born girls, who would have been only too glad to overlook his vulgarity for the sake of his money-bags. And then, to think it had rested with her to make Beatrice happy, and restore Chesham Court to its rightful possessors. It was a great temptation, but the thought of her one pure love sustained her through it all. False to her principles she might have

been, but false to him—never ! She would not sell her own happiness and his for all the gold that glittered ; God would protect the fatherless and the widow. She would be true to her heart and to her love !

It was therefore with a proud smile upon her lips that she came through the open window on that summer afternoon, and bent her graceful head for Adrian's blessing. She was so happy that she scarcely noticed the unusual pallor of the young minister's face, the quivering of his lips, the trembling of his fingers, as he took her hand. She seated herself on an ottoman near his chair, and talked with a light-heartedness she had not known for weeks of her sister's rapid recovery, and the change that must soon be made in their future prospects.

"It is of that change I have come to speak to-day," said Adrian, looking on the ground.

"Yes ?"

Her hands, like two large snow-drops, lay

clasped on her lap, their perfect whiteness relieved by the black dress she wore.

"What is Lady Slade going to do?"

"I do not know exactly," replied Catherine, at whose heart a wild joy reigned. "She has a great many invitations from friends. The probability is, she will accept one of them; in fact I do not see how she can do otherwise."

"Poor Lady Slade, hers is a sad future, I fear;——and yours,——Catherine?"

He was looking down at her, his dark eyes filled with unutterable anguish, but she did not see them; her face was bent so that he could not see the crimson blushes that would come, in spite of her efforts to prevent them.

"Oh! I—I shall find a refuge somewhere," she replied, with a forced gaiety.

Adrian sighed. "I wish—I wish," he said, then broke off suddenly.

Catherine was trembling, her hands toyed nervously with the flowers that lay in her lap; she pulled their petals off one by one.

Adrian bent over her. "My child," he said, "I wish you would do what I desire."

Catherine glanced up at him, half-timidly, half-roguishly. "How can I, until you tell me what it is," she said, with a little nervous laugh.

The young minister did not immediately reply, but stood gazing out of the open window, with the far-away look he so often had, his lips moving as if in prayer. The long-desired yet dreaded moment had arrived. Catherine waited in sweet tremulous expectancy for his next words, no longer a marble statue, but a breathing, loving, beautiful woman!

He came back to her rapidly. "I wish you to enter the 'Sisterhood of Mercy.'"

All the colour instantly faded out of her face, she looked up at him with white quivering lips.

"Into the 'Sisterhood of Mercy,' I? to be a nun?"

How she faltered out the words, she never knew. The blood flew back to her

heart, she was sick for very fear. What could he mean? Ah! she saw it now, he wanted to have her near him, to make sure she would not leave the town. Slowly the soft flushes stole back to her cheeks.

"It is my dearest wish," said Adrian, and his voice was as gentle and caressing as that of a woman. "I know it is very human and very selfish, but I want to know you are safe before I go away."

Catherine started, this time the roseate flush did not return so soon. "Go away?" what could she do but echo his own words?

"I must, Catherine, I must; I have struggled hard, but longer I dare not stay, duty calls me elsewhere. I go to obey that call."

A sudden light broke on Catherine's meditations: he loved her! and he dared not tell her, he was going away for this! He was so shy, so modest, that he could not see how dearly he was loved in return. She fell to examining earnestly the petals

of a rose. Where he stood he could mark it all: the regal sweep of that queenly figure, the golden coronet of plaits surmounting the aristocratic little head.

A half-smile was trembling on her lips. "It is a thousand pities, Mr. Hope, that you are obliged to leave your mission, just when you were doing so much good. Is there *nothing* that would induce you to stay?"

Was the man mad? why did he not kneel before her there, and avow his love? Could he not see how readily it would be returned? She felt half-vexed at his apparent stupidity, a man of the world would have seized the opportunity long before. And then her pride was mortified at having as it were to draw him out. She would say no more, it would be unmaidenly, immodest. His next words startled her by their passionate vehemence.

"Nothing! nothing! had I all the riches of the earth laid at my feet, I could not resist the call! Had I every temptation

life can give, I must tear myself away." His face was turned away from her as he spoke, but his dark eyes were flashing with the fire of enthusiasm that was consuming his ardent soul.

"Where are you going?"

She tried to speak calmly, but the spasm at her heart prevented her, something in her throat checked her utterance, still she was determined he should not see how foolish she had been, what a terrible mistake she had made.

He replied, still looking outwards, "Far away,—across the sea; listen, Catherine: there are souls for whom a God has died perishing in a heathen land; their cries and tears are borne to us across the weary waste of waters. A little band of brave devoted men have elected to seek that distant Corean shore, and I, humblest of their number, am going with them."

Catherine was stupefied. "Going to Corea! to become a missionary?" she stammered out.

"Yes, if God pleases ; if I am not too unworthy."

"How can you talk like that; you who are so good, who have done so much in Rubestown? Why should you leave the place where your work has been so blessed?"

"No, it has not been blessed ; it is a snare and a delusion to think it ever could be. Why am I going?——Why?——Catherine, can *you* ask that question?" he was looking at her now, a whole world of fondness in his dark earnest eyes ; "because this place has grown too dear to me! because earth has become so very fair, I am losing all wish for heaven!"

She was not deceived then, he did love her after all. She bent down till her proud sweet face rested on his clasped hands. "Is it not possible," she murmured, "to have earth and heaven too?"

For one moment he hesitated, he was but mortal, and his heart was very human and tender. One quick convulsive pressure, and then he put her gently from him.

"No ! no !" he cried, "the things of this world are not for me. I am a priest of God, and a priest should be pure, and holy, and undefiled ; I must obey the call of Him who sent me."

Over his pale ascetic face there stole a look such as a seraph might wear, an almost divine light shone in his beautiful eyes.

Catherine's own eyes were full of mortified tears ; but the fervour of his religious enthusiasm carried her away with him. She stood up, eager and resolute.

"If you go to be a missionary, I will go too ; women have done such things before to-day."

"Women have, but only in peculiar instances. Such a life was never meant for you, it is not your vocation. How could you, high-born, delicate as you are, how could you battle with the heat of the climate ; the rough usage of rude and undisciplined men ? No, my sister, you must stay behind, in the House of Mercy, I hope : think of the good you can do !"

"Think of the good you could do," these were Plantagenet's own words, the temptation he had held out to her. These two men, as far apart as the poles, unconsciously struck the same chord. Ah, me! she felt as if she would never do good anymore, as if life for her was over, and things might take their course, whether for weal or woe, she did not care.

"I do not see it matters to you," she said, bitterly, "since you are going away, what becomes of me. I do not suppose the thought of me will ever disturb your missionary life."

He looked at her sorrowfully. "You know that is not true," he replied, in a pained voice. "You know that here, or in Corea, you are the dearest in the world to me. Why do you grieve me, by pretending to think otherwise? Is not the bitterness of parting enough?"

She was on her knees now, sobbing as if her heart would break, her pride all gone in the intensity of her passionate despair.

She kissed his hands, his robe, imploring him not to leave her, to stay to be her father, her friend, her consoler.

But the young minister was determined ; he had put his "hand to the plough," and would not look back. He would go, though it tore out his heart to leave her. Gently but firmly he raised her up, gently but firmly he expostulated with her, blaming himself in all things for the mad infatuation into which they had drifted, for his weakness in not flying from the very beginning when he first felt that he loved her, and that she was not indifferent to him ; pointing out the blessings of his future life, that she who listened could plead nothing against his departure, save the love she was too proud to own, too pure to show, any more. But he needed no confession, the intensity of his own anguish was doubled when he saw how dearly she loved him, what he might have if he chose for the asking.

It needed all his strength of mind and

powerful endurance to put the charmed cup away from his lips; to leave the woman he so madly worshipped in the hour of her greatest need.

But the missionary conquered !

The man, weak and irresolute where his heart was concerned, yielded to the might of prayer, and the future martyr triumphed over the death of his earthly affections.

Was he wrong, or right ? There was One who said, " Unless a man leave all things he cannot be My disciple." And He who uttered these awful words knew how weak the heart of man is, how vain and how deceitful.

CHAPTER IX.

BY THE SAD SEA WAVES.

TIME is a great leveller. As some one has facetiously observed, addressing the terrestrial globe :—

“Roll on, thou ball, roll on
Through pathless realms of space ;
It's true my prospects all look blue,
But don't let that unsettle you :
Never *you* mind, roll on.”

And the same chronicler goes on to remark, that,—It rolls on !

So it was with Lady Slade, and the rest of our friends in Moorshire. The ball rolled on, despite Chesham Court being sold to the Jews, despite Catherine Hyde enter-

ing the "Postulate of Mercy," and Plantagenet Jones's Bill, for compelling people to attend evening service, being thrown out by a large majority.

The ball rolled on, and the affairs of our Rubestown acquaintances, so terrible and momentous to themselves, were lapsed in the womb of time. Another monarch reigned at Chesham Court, and the little world of society, and the great world of the people, bowed down and worshipped the new star that had entered their planetary system, without one thought of the brilliant constellations that had appeared for a season and were seen no more.

The Slades and their sad history became a thing of the past.

A great change came over Plantagenet Jones. The great banker and member of parliament, usually so jovial and good tempered, became on a sudden sullen and morose, withdrawing himself from all society, and devoting himself almost exclusively to his parliamentary duties.

The life Miss Sarah Archer now led with him was no sinecure, she had lost both her young relatives, for Maria was married to her Plunger, and Jane had entered the "House of Mercy." Plantagenet Jones, left to himself and her society, was as cross as a bear, till at length after a long fit of temper on his part, the fair Sarah left him to fulfil a similar position in the house of another relative, a rich clergyman and widower, in the consoling of whom she hoped eventually to solve the problem, that has never been solved for eighteen hundred years, namely, that of serving God and mammon.

The only Rubestown people with whom the banker seemed inclined to keep up an acquaintance were the Harringtons. But Stanley, who had not quite liked his manner of acting in the matter of Chesham Court, fought shy of his parliamentary colleague whenever he could, generally pleading some "bore" in the shape of an engagement deprived him of the pleasure of the millionaire's society.

Mrs. Harrington, who never really liked the Joneses, and who had either not been able, or never cared to throw her meshes over the cautious old banker, found a ready excuse for not visiting in the absence of ladies at Bingley Towers, and went on in her usual frivolous, nonchalant way, driving her ponies, and setting men wild with her saucy mocking smiles—her dark wicked eyes, as if there was no sin or misery in the world, no sad cruel death to lay at her door.

Men believed in her, and her husband idolized her. She was a queen of society—that society that delights in the low vulgarity of a Madame Angôt, that takes its sons and its daughters to witness the indelicate seductions of a Duchess of Gerolstein, that knows no sin save the sin of being found out. It was only pure women who shrank away with an indefinable instinct from the touch of the modern Lamia, who shuddered with a secret terror when they saw their husbands or their lovers under the spell of her dangerous fascinations.

But she was witty, and wise, and clever, and the world worshipped her.

Lamia, Gretchen, and Beatrice, are the three types of women who have existed ever since the world began ! It takes many quantities to form a whole, and the "ball rolls on," heedless of sin or sorrow, of evil or of good, till it stands transfixed on the threshold of that other existence that is lighted by the purity of God.

A year has passed away, and Lady Slade has succumbed to the overpowering influence of the great consoler, Time, aided by his two strong adjutants, Youth and Health. The colour has returned to her cheeks, the light to her eyes, her step is as elastic as a girl's, as she trips down the rocky pathway that leads to the sea shore, where, sitting on the high white glittering sand, with his young companions around him, she has left her boy.

We should scarcely know it to be Beatrice Slade, she is so changed. No

trace of her recent sorrow, save in her deep black dress and the white cap that surmounts without disfiguring her beautiful brown hair. Still, if you look at her closer, there is some secret trouble, some unspoken haunting fear, hidden behind those sweet dark eyes,—not always there, it is true, but fitfully, with tremulous starts, as if listening to the sound of waters heard afar off, or a voice from the other world.

Her life at Sunnyside was one of delicious repose; from the first day she reached the home that was henceforth to be hers as long as she willed, she commenced to mend, and every day brought some new pleasure, some new excitement with it.

First, the house. Never was such an exquisite little gem seen before as Robert Burton had prepared for his idol. All that money without extravagance could do was lavished on the casket that held his jewel, and Lady Slade could scarcely realize that she was not still in one of her own pretty rooms at Chesham Court. If the good folks of Rubestown could but have seen,

they would no longer have wondered what the steward did with his money ! Servants to wait upon her, a small basket carriage to drive, every wish and want anticipated, a pony for her boy and a maid for herself, and all for the small sum of one hundred pounds a year.

There is no knowing what some men will not do, nor some women believe ! Beatrice conscientiously regarded the pittance she contributed to the weekly commissariat, as an off-set to the delicacies that were placed upon her table, and thought—if she ever thought about it at all—that it was astonishing how well the middle classes lived, and how wonderfully they imitated the manners of their betters.

She never guessed, how should she ? that Robert Burton was living in a humble lodging in the town, confining himself to almost bare necessities, so that she might have all she required. She never guessed, when she met him, smiling and courteous, on the sands, that his dinner had been of

the most frugal description, so that she might lay at her ease in the carriage he had provided for her use.

Mr. Burton often came in the evening to the villa, and from subjects of business the conversation would sometimes drift to other things, and Beatrice was both astonished and pleased to find the rich mines of knowledge with which his mind was stored, the tone of deep and earnest thought that pervaded his every feeling. At other times he joined them on the shore, where the boy was ever ready for a game with his preserver, a miniature ship to swim, or shells and sea-weed to seek for, to add to his mother's collection. Then they would all sit down beneath the shelter of a rock, and Robert Burton, with a shy timidity that contrasted oddly with his usual fearless bearing, would tell stories of the sea and seafaring life, till the boy's blue eyes expanded with childish wonder, and Beatrice's rosy lips parted with a smile.

She was happy, and she was contented !

No sound, save occasional letters from her friends, reached her from the Babel she had left behind. All her weary past, all her unhappy life with Sir Reginald, was remembered only as a troubled dream, and she dreaded lest into her Eden there should come any voice to wake up the bitter memories of her bygone life.

A great joy had come to her soon after her arrival at Sunnyside. It was a letter from Rosamond — Rosamond Etheridge no longer, but Lady Arthur Trelawney, able at last to proclaim her innocence to the world.

"It was a sad, sad time for me, dearest Beatrice," wrote the impulsive and warm-hearted girl, "to know I was deceiving you all, and letting you think I was unmarried, when all the time I was a happy wife; but what could we do? Arthur's cruel uncle had threatened to disinherit him if he dared to marry without his consent, and we knew he would never consent to a marriage with a poor officer's portionless daughter. It was that last

season in town, Beatrice, when you took me up with you to Belgrave Square, that I became dear Arthur's wife. We were married at a little church in Knightsbridge, but he made me promise solemnly to tell no one, not even my mother ; for all our future hopes and prospects hung upon the secret being kept. I kept it till I feared I could keep it no longer, and then, in my agony, fled, thinking little, and caring less, what the world might say of me then. What would it have said had I remained ? It was all beautifully arranged. Dear Arthur found me a home with some of his friends, who were as anxious to keep our secret as ourselves, and I stole away, as you will remember, on the day of the election, when every one was too much occupied to pay any attention to me. Oh ! if I had known then as I know now, the sorrow and shame I caused my dear mother, the suffering I gave my friends, and the dreadful things that were said of me, I do not think I could have lived ; but I was away

and did not know. Arthur kept every letter, every paper, from my sight, and in due time our little girl was born—Oh ! such a beauty, Beatrice, and called after you. Then I was carried off to France, and stayed there, longing for home and to show my baby to my friends. When the news reached me of Sir Reginald's sudden death and your dangerous illness, I flew back to England, and, having obtained my husband's permission to see you, came to Chesham Court, with what result your sister will doubtless have told you. Sorrowful and disappointed, I dared not stay a moment longer in Rubestown than sufficed to see my mother and prevail on her to accompany me back to France. There we have been staying till Arthur's uncle died, and we could fearlessly take possession of our ancestral estates.

“Our ancestral estates ! how funny that sounds, Beatrice. I have such a great big castle to live in, and I walk in and out of the grand old rooms, feeling much the

same as 'Beauty' in the fairy tale, expecting every moment the monster to come and devour me. But my 'Beast,' like hers, is only a handsome young prince, and I am happy, Oh, so happy! ever so much more than I deserve.

"You must come and live with me, Beatrice; you and Francis. Arthur will be delighted, and by-and-bye, when your boy grows up, who knows that baby and he may not fall in love with each other, and we shall be really relatives then, and not pretend to be sisters as we did in the dear old days. I am coming to see you of course. Arthur was so disgusted and angry about the things that were said of me, that he scarcely ever lets me out of his sight, but takes me about with him everywhere. He actually pretends he is proud of his wife—he! who might have married any girl in London or in England for the matter of that; but he is going away soon to shoot, and then I shall fly to my own Beatrice, and carry her away to my

grim old castle, never to be parted again. I am dying to shew you baby ; she has got such darling pearly teeth, and the prettiest pink toes in the world."

But when Rosamond came, all radiance and blushes, Beatrice could not be persuaded to leave her sea-side home, not even to live in a castle with the prospective nuptials of Sir Francis Slade and the Honorable Beatrice Trelawney before her. She was glad to see her little friend again, and to know she was really the true noble innocent Rosamond she had ever thought her. She rejoiced as fervently as the bride over her unexpected happiness and the splendid position she held,—her husband being the next heir to an earldom—but no fond caresses, no winning words, could induce her to return to that society, in which she had hitherto found such misery.

"Let me stay where I am," she pleaded, "I am happy here, far happier than I should ever be were I in the world again, with all its glitter, its sham, its hollowness,

around me. I would not change with you, dear Rosamond, for all the rent rolls of your estates. I may possibly change my views in time ; perhaps, when Francis grows up, and it is necessary for his sake for me to be in society again, I may nerve myself to do it, but at present all I want is peace and quietude."

Rosamond said no more. She had an instinctive feeling that Lady Slade was right, and her generous heart was filled with love and reverence for the woman who had gone through such bitter trials, who was learning the lesson of life down by the beautiful sea ; but though she left her now, Lady Trelawney determined to make another effort by-and-bye, and entertained but little doubt that she would be able to overcome the objections of Lady Slade, and induce her to return to that society which she was so pre-eminently fitted to adorn.

Beatrice, however, did not relent ; letter after letter came from her faithful friend to meet with the self-same answer—no !

She was at rest, she thought, at last!

The hours she spent on those sands, her child by her side, watching the great waves breaking on the shore in a beautiful fringe of foam, or ebbing to and fro in liquid splendour beneath the golden rays of the setting sun, were the happiest she had ever known. Sometimes the party would be joined by Mrs. Burton and her son, who frequently brought a book with him, and read the choicest passages from his favourite authors aloud to Lady Slade.

Beatrice was greatly surprised and delighted. Well educated herself, she had nevertheless read but little of the authors whom Robert Burton preferred, and her life since her marriage had not been conducive to many literary pursuits. Robert Burton opened a new path of knowledge, and spread the store-houses of his powerful imagination before her view. In her own well-filled drawing-rooms, or in the saloons of the witty Mrs. Harrington, she had met with men whose every sentence was like a

meteoric spark, whose brilliant conversational talents were the admiration of all who heard them ; but here was a man—one of the people—with a mind and thought far beyond any whom she had met with in society, who shewed her life in an utterly different light from that which she had been accustomed to regard it, and taught her that truth, self-sacrifice, and noble deeds were far beyond jewels and rank. He taught her that man's mission here was to become "like unto God," and such was not attained by living in gilded palaces, and having purple and fine linen to wear, but by possessing a meek and charitable spirit, seeking the good of others always before its own.

And Beatrice listened and wondered, as he shewed her in simple and forcible language, how men and women of whom the world knew comparatively nothing, were living noble, self-sacrificing lives ; lives of heroism and magnanimity ; lives of unsullied purity and truth, and were yet regarded by their

fellow-creatures as simple ordinary individuals, into whose hearts had come a deeper touch of the kindliness of Christ.

To do good to others ; to make the lives of others less bitter than they would have been had you not come amongst them, to urge them to look forward to a happier holier life in the glorious world to come. That was the secret of the creation.

"But how can a lady do all this?" pleaded Beatrice. "What opportunities has she to exercise such faculties even if she possessed them? Sermons were meant for clergymen to preach; no one would listen to them from the lips of others."

He laughed, bitterly and scornfully.

"There is such a thing as sermons in stones, but a woman dressed up like a doll from morning to night, with no higher occupation than answering invitations—no harder work than snipping a few dead leaves off the plants in her conservatory, could hardly be said to preach at all."

Beatrice flushed angrily over neck and brow. "I think you are in error there, Mr. Burton, the ladies of the upper classes are not so indolent as you suppose."

"I beg your pardon," he said, ironically. "I know—I know, they work harder sometimes than a labouring man. Shall I sketch out for you the life of a fashionable woman? She rises, let me say at ten, that is not too early, is it? There is breakfast and her flowers to arrange, and her letters to read and write for the day, then she has to ride in the Park for an hour, and return to lunch; after lunch, dress again for the afternoon's drive, and in all probability has to pay several fatiguing visits to people whom she does not care in the least about, and with whom she has not one single sentiment in common. Then home to dinner and another change of robes, and afterwards to the opera, and perhaps a ball. It is therefore possibly three o'clock in the morning before she can retire to rest, too tired probably to say a prayer.

How much of that day has been given to God? What is the end or aim of that woman's existence? If she is single, a wealthy marriage; if she is married, the settlement of her daughters. Truly there is no harder task-master than that same society, and these are beings who have minds and souls, whom God has endowed with rational powers, with lofty aspirations."

Lady Slade sat silent and thoughtful. "I think you are rather hard, Mr. Burton, upon us poor women," she said, after a pause.

"Hard, not at all; it is not your fault, it is the fault of the world that preaches such doctrines, of the society that exacts such slavish worship from its votaries. Madam, I am but a poor man, but I would not give up my independence to be lord of the finest estate I have ever seen, if, by doing so, I was obliged to wear silk stockings, and degrade my intellect to the level of those around me."

Beatrice did not reply, but rose and

walked away in silence. She was slightly annoyed, for she felt in her own mind that he was condemning her. She was angry with him. What right had he, a man of the people, to presume to lecture a patrician and an aristocrat ?

Forgetting that she herself asked for his opinion, she determined she would not let him speak on the same subject again. He should keep his radical plebeian ideas to himself.

But the next morning found her restless and discontented, and her hazel eyes were full of tremulous anxiety, till she saw the manly form of Robert Burton coming down the path that led to the shore.

Condemning her ! could she but have known how wildly, how madly that man worshipped the ground she trod on, the very spot touched by her dainty little feet, her anger would have taken quite a different form.

With Robert Burton life had suddenly developed into fairyland. Fairyland, I say,

for, however beautiful and enchanting it was, he knew perfectly well that it was no more real than the transformation scene in a Christmas pantomime. To have his lovely mistress living in a house of his ; to see her every day, and twice a day if he chose, to be permitted to enjoy her society, and be treated, if not as an equal, at least like a gentleman, was a height of rapture to which at one time he would have thought it impossible to attain.

And so his poor brain got muddled, and he scarcely knew what he was doing, but walked about in the fool's paradise he had created for himself, in an atmosphere of unutterable bliss. Never wearying of attending her, never weary of doing her bidding, he would walk for miles to get a flower that she wanted, a fern that she admired ; in short he did and acted as every other idiot in a similar position has acted since the world began.

Beatrice accepted all his services at first as her due, she had been so accustomed to

attention at Chesham Court, to find not only servants but gentlemen anxious to anticipate her wishes, she never supposed that the devotion of her ex-steward could be more than the natural result of his position, and her pure nature rendering her fearless of evil, she encouraged his attentions far more than she would have done, had she read her own heart aright.

It was only natural, she thought, that he should meet them in their morning's walk. Francis must have some one with him, or he would be getting into mischief, and she was far too delicate and nervous to look after him herself. Then if they went for a pic-nic on the downs, or an afternoon's sail, who so fit as Robert Burton to arrange the place, or steer the boat. There were no men of her own order at Sunnyside, and if there had been, the pale young widow, who shrank from all society, would never have known them.

Many respectfully raised their hats, as the noble-looking woman with her beauti-

ful child passed them on the cliff. Many ladies evinced a desire to be introduced, but no one was ever admitted within the precincts of the villa, where the lovely lady lived with her blue-eyed, fair-haired son.

A calm-looking, quakerish old lady was her only companion, and Sunnyside society confidently asserted that the handsome dark gentleman who was so often with Lady Slade was the old lady's son, and tutor to the young Sir Francis.

If we only occupied the place that rumour often assigns us, what curious positions in life we should sometimes fill!

And so it came to pass, that never a day dawned but found Burton for some pretext or another at the villa; if he stayed away Beatrice was sure to send for him. While he was near her, she felt a sense of strength and of protection that vanished when he departed.

Although Sir Reginald's affairs had been settled by his solicitors, there was still an

amount of local business that still required Lady Slade's attention. Old documents to be looked over, old bills to be destroyed; and in all this she fancied that the steward's assistance was indispensable, as she professed to know but little of such matters. It occupied them many a long evening in the winter-time, when Mrs. Burton sat knitting or dozing by the fire-side. Lady Slade was anxious to dismiss all these records of a painful past as quickly as she could, and Robert Burton spared her as much trouble as lay in his power.

Beatrice was no hypocrite. She mourned for her husband really and truly, but it was the sinful and terrible circumstances of his death for which she grieved, not for the loss of a love she had never known. If he had died peaceably and quietly in his bed it would have been different, but to rush into eternity by his own mad act, after plunging the whole of his family into irretrievable ruin, was a shock almost too terrible to contemplate.

One evening, as they were examining a number of old accounts, selecting those to be sent to the solicitors, from those to be destroyed, Beatrice's attention was attracted to one marked 'private' and directed to Sir Reginald. She opened it mechanically, caring little whose it was, or what it was about, but her woman's curiosity was aroused when she perceived it was from the Rubestown jeweller, Mr. Sugden. Her eyes wandered over the long list of trinkets, many of which she could not recollect her husband buying, when her gaze was suddenly arrested by the item of a pearl necklace, value one thousand guineas. The bill fell from her trembling fingers, her sudden pallor told the steward that something unusual must have occurred to occasion Lady Slade such deep emotion. Troubled and concerned, he stooped to pick up the paper, but Beatrice anticipating the act, took it from his hand and threw it on the fire; and, as the last expiring records of her husband's infidelity,

and her friend's perfidious treachery, disappeared from her view, so passed from her heart the last lingering elements of love for a man who had so cruelly treated and so basely deceived her.

It seemed her fate, poor woman, to lose all her friends. As ill-fortune would have it, the winter was no sooner over than Robert Burton, from some unaccountable freak or other reason, announced his intention of going to Canada, and commencing a new life there. Was there ever anything so provoking, just too when she required his aid and advice so very much, and he had become so necessary that neither she nor Francis could well do without him?

Who could she look to for aid and assistance, now? Lord Arthur Trelawney was all very well, but he had his own affairs to attend to, and he could not possibly understand her like Robert Burton did. Then Francis required some one more of a companion than his nurses. It was all very

stupid, and very unsatisfactory. Why should he go to Canada, when she wanted him at home ?

Mrs. Burton said nothing, but she peered over her spectacles at her son, and the tears stole silently down her furrowed cheeks. Still, to Lady Slade's great vexation, she neither did nor said anything to prevent his going ; and when Beatrice at last expostulated with her on the subject, she only shook her head.

"I shall never see him more, my lady," she said, "but the Lord's will be done ; he is right to go, and I will not stop him."

CHAPTER X.

“HE WAS THE ONLY SON OF HIS MOTHER, AND
SHE WAS A WIDOW.”

THE departure of Robert Burton created quite a vacuum in the little family at Sunnyside. A shadow seemed to have overspread all their happiness, and though the sea danced, and the sun shone, and the birds sang just as merrily as when he was there, it was not the same to his mother or Beatrice Slade.

The morning walks lost all their interest, the evening strolls their charm. Beatrice missed the strong vigorous arm that helped her over the rough places in the rocks, the quaint philosophical discussions that so in-

terested and amused her. She missed his joyous laugh, his tender smile, the voice into whose sonorous tones there came a deeper pathos, an unutterable sweetness when addressing her, the firm quick tread that had lately caused her heart to palpitate and throb, a faint soft blush to suffuse her cheeks.

A sense of intense desolation came over her. We never know the value of anything till we lose it, and Beatrice Slade found that during the past eighteen months Robert Burton had become so necessary to her happiness that his absence was a loss no other being could supply. She had never dreamt of his leaving her. She was so accustomed to see him, to look for his coming, that she thought this state of things would go on for ever. It was so pleasant to have a man like him, proud, handsome, with a mind and soul at least equal if not superior to most men she had known, to be her willing slave, to wait upon her hand and foot, to anticipate her wishes, to advise and console her in all her troubles.

She almost felt herself aggrieved by his departure.

Why need he go? He could not care much for her, she thought, if he could leave her so easily; and then the recollection of having once or twice caught those dark passionate eyes fixed upon her with an expression of unmistakable love and adoration, caused a burning blush to suffuse her cheeks.

Perhaps he had dared to love her, and the remembrance of the gulf between them had forced him, in despair, to tear himself away. And then she fell to pitying him, as women will, and felt sorry that he should have to quit his native land because she was so fair and so far above him. How kind he was, how good, how true, how far superior to many in a much higher position than his!

Perhaps when he was abroad he would marry. Then she fell to imagining what his wife would be like; where he would find a woman of his own order who would fulfil all the requirements of his exacting mind.

No, it was impossible he should ever marry. He would never find a companion congenial to his tastes ; and then she thought how such a man as he could love, what untold depths of passion, what strength of affection lay beneath that calm proud manner, that dreamy quietude.

She had heard from his mother all about the dead Lucy, of the fidelity to her memory that Robert Burton had ever preserved, and she was never weary of hearing Mrs. Burton relate the story of that sad past, the records of that pure and faithful love that was so sweet, yet so unfortunate. Her heart went out in pity to the man whose life had been marred in the commencement by a blow from which his heart had never fully recovered, whose existence had never been cheered by the caresses of wife or children, whose life was one grand sacrifice, raised on the altar of his departed love. And now he had gone away, and something at her heart told her she was the cause ; and while the conscious blushes came at the thought of

this tribute to her attractions, she liked him all the better for the delicacy of feeling, the nobility of soul that went and gave no sign. Another man might have presumed upon her changed position, her gracious familiarity, her ever present gratitude to the preserver of her child. Another man would have risked her anger in the mad desire to win some dearer token of regard from the woman he had dared to love, and who, by her manner at least, had given reasonable encouragement to his hopes; but he, without a word, without a sign, save the mute eloquence of eyes that told all the tongue endeavoured to conceal, had touched her hand and parted, perchance to meet no more.

She would go back after a while into the great world of society from which she came, and he, in the distant woods of Canada, complete the expiation of his self-sacrificed, yet glorious life.

Whatever Beatrice's feelings were on the subject, the letters from Canada betrayed no unhappiness on the part of the writer.

He spoke of his arrival there, of the kindness he met with from friends and neighbours, and the ready aid and sympathy that was offered in all his undertakings; he described his future home, situated in one of the most picturesque and beautiful parts of the country, beneath the shelter of some magnificent rocks, with a glittering cascade descending from their summit, and the great pine forests stretching out before them. He described in glowing language the clearing of his plot, the building of his house, the dangers and vicissitudes he had encountered, the line of active work to be from henceforth his. "It is work I want, and work I must do," he wrote; "my restless heart cannot otherwise be satisfied, I have plenty of it here both for hand and brain; and the people are so good, and kind, and simple, it is like living in the primeval world."

Then after many months another letter came, in which he described his journey to Ottawa, and his detention in that city on

business of importance. He spoke eagerly and hopefully of the rising prospects of that important town, and the fresh sphere of action that, for the present, engrossed all his thoughts.

He told them how, insensibly at first, he had become mixed up with men of standing and position ; how he had frequented their meetings and debates, till at length nothing would satisfy them, but that he must enter the legislature, and take his stand with the representatives of their country. He described his feelings of repugnance and reluctance on finding himself placed in such a prominent position ; and then, as the good he might do, and the service he might render to his newly-adopted country, was brought before him, he at once threw himself into his new work with all the energy of his character, and never rested till, by his powerful speaking, his convincing arguments, he succeeded in gaining any point he had in view.

But it was not from letters alone that Lady Slade heard of the rapid career of the

new senator. The Canadian papers teemed with favourable articles and reviews on the rising member, and pointed out how, ere long, he might if he chose, rise to the highest honours of the Dominion parliament.

These letters were read over and over again, both by Mrs. Burton and Lady Slade. They formed the principal subject of conversation day after day, night after night, to the two women whom, by birth so far apart, sorrow and affection had brought together; for Beatrice could scarcely conceal from herself, struggle how she might, that she loved this man as she had never loved before, and that into her life had stolen a new delicious ineffable delight, of whose existence she had never dreamed, but of whose sweetness she dared not drink.

Yes! he was right to go from a woman who could never be his, whose life belonged to her boy!

Her boy! Even while she slept and dreamed, the summons had come from another world, and the white wings of

Azreal had touched the child lightly on the lips, bidding him rise up and follow. Her boy! her beautiful boy! how little did she suspect, while she watched him playing on the sands, and her heart was full of bitterness against the dead father who had deprived him of his rightful inheritance; that no earthly possessions were ever to be his, no coronet rest on that fair young brow save the crown of eternal light!

It was just about this time that Lady Slade received a letter from her sister Catherine, announcing her approaching nuptials with Plantagenet Jones.

For months and months after Adrian's departure, the proud girl had struggled with her unhappy love, striving to find in the path he had pointed out to her, and amidst the consolations of religion, the rest her soul required.

But all in vain. Devout as she was, throwing herself in her passionate self-abnegation, into all the hardest work of the Sisterhood of Mercy, she utterly failed to

find the peace she sought inside the walls of her Convent home. She hoped,—she could not help hoping,—that Adrian, when his first fervour was passed, would not be able to resist the influence of her charms, but return to the post he had deserted, content to do his duty as an ordinary minister of the Church, and to unite the purgative with the unitive state of life.

But when news came from the Corea that the Rev. Adrian Hope was not only one of the most zealous and fervent missionaries there, but had become a Roman Catholic priest, she felt all was at an end. This was a barrier that no love could over-leap!

Her self-imposed life became harsh and distasteful to her; accustomed to luxuries, she could not do without them. She fell to thinking of the words that both her lovers had used with regard to her future.

She thought of the *good* she could do! She was certain she could do far more good in the world than out of it. Her life would

be a time-long penance either way, and she might as well marry Plantagenet Jones as any other man, as he could give her all those luxuries which her expensive tastes required, and which never interfered with her devotions. She really had no heart to give to anyone, and if not happy herself, she could at least by a wealthy marriage make others happy; and as Plantagenet Jones had lately succeeded in obtaining, through his parliamentary influence, one of those enviable orders of knighthood which Her Gracious Majesty distributes every year to the most deserving of her liege subjects, Catherine again thought over his proposal, which from time to time he renewed, and finally accepted him; stipulating, however, that she should never reside at Bingley Towers. She could not bear to remain in a place fraught with so many bitter and painful recollections, where every object seemed to remind her of her lost and saintly love.

Catherine's first thought after her marriage was of Beatrice and her child. Chesham Court had passed away, but

another estate could easily be bought, where the young Sir Francis could hold his own, and his gentle mother grow bright and happy again.

Alas for them ! her sacrifice was vain.

The wedding bells were scarcely hushed, when the agonized mother awoke to the full consciousness that another and a bitterer trouble than all was yet to be hers, and her darling was slipping away from her with every ebb of the tide. It came upon her as all such things do come—in startling suddenness. She had known that the cold caught after his immersion in the river had left a slight cough behind it, which at times occasioned her great anxiety. She had noticed the hectic flush on his cheeks, the almost unnatural brilliancy of his large blue eyes ; but he was so bright, so gay, and so light-hearted, that the foolish mother was unwilling to connect these signs with evil.

Francis was delicate, that was all ; he would grow out of it by-and-bye.

It was Mrs. Burton who gave the first

alarm. She had seen those signs before, and knew too well what they portended. She insisted on having the child well wrapped up, even on quite warm days, and not allowing him to be out after sunset; and then advised Beatrice to send for the first physician in the county, to the wonderment of Lady Slade, who would not see that there was anything the matter with the child, and really thought it quite unnecessary.

But the truth came out at last, and Beatrice knew that long before the summer faded, her beautiful flower would droop and die.

At first she would not believe it!

He dying! who seemed in the bloom of life and health! it was a false alarm! they were deceiving both her and themselves. The child, her only darling, should *not* be taken from her!

At last, when the whole terrible reality forced itself upon her convictions, she thought she must die too, for life without her child would be unbearable.

Oh, how she wept and prayed ! beseeching God to spare him ! entreating God to take all other pleasures from her ! to leave her homeless, desolate, poor, so that He did not take away her life, her heart's dear blood, her little innocent child !

At times the violence of her grief drove her almost to madness, and she called God "cruel" in her sinful anger. He who possessed all the treasures of the universe was taking her only treasure from her.

Ah, how pityingly must the Divine eyes of Mercy look down from heaven on the unthinking anguish of His suffering children !

Could we only see as He sees—how much better it is for us that it should be so—should we ever repine ? Should we not trust more in that Fatherly goodness that permits not a sparrow to fall to the ground without His knowledge ?

Oh, poor humanity ! Oh, poor humanity ! He who wept at the grave of His friend also felt for the anguish of a widowed

mother, and we trust our poor Beatrice will be forgiven for saying and thinking that "God had forsaken her!"

Mrs. Burton, with her strict and almost puritanical religious views, calmed and consoled Beatrice all she could, but the unhappy mother refused to be comforted, and battled with the insidious destroyer that was stealing away her darling's life.

All that money and love could do was done to save him. But by-and-bye the little limbs grew weary and tired, the little feet refused to carry the feverish excitable body any longer, and the boy gave over building his sand castles, his miniature barricades, and was obliged to let his playmates build them for him, while he lay and watched them from his chair, and laughed in childish pleasure as the sea washed them all away.

Every day during that long, long summer, when the weather was fine, he would be carried down to where, under the shelter of a friendly rock, he could see the

children playing in the sunshine, the waves breaking softly on the golden sands.

His little friends from time to time would leave off in the midst of their games to bring him a shell, a curious pebble, a strip of long dark sea-weed rescued from the sea. Things utterly valueless in themselves, but priceless from the love that gave them.

The elder children gathered round the dying boy, into whose eyes the light of another world had already stolen, and cheered him with their little stories, their childish songs, their gifts of fruit and flowers.

Children's sympathies are easy to touch ; their tears lie always close behind their eyes, and death has a wonderment to the youthful mind that almost destroys its sense of awe.

He was so gentle, so patient, so uncomplaining !

He would lie for hours, his hand in that of his mother's, watching the sea and the ships, and the great white fleecy clouds, beyond whose azure splendour lay his future home.

A dangerous reef lay close to that rocky shore, outside of which a buoy was moored bearing a light and a bell ; when the tide flowed in, the rushing waters caused it to sound, and it was one of Francis's great delights to lie and listen to that moaning bell, every toll of which rang a knell on his mother's heart.

Oh, those bells—those bells !

From her bridal to her darling's death they had chequered all her life !

Now joyful, now sad, now ringing, ringing out in glad triumphal peals ; now slow and muffled for the guilty dead. At times calmly sweet like the clear soft chimes of All Saints' Church ; now mournfully wailing like that bell on the distant sea.

Was it a wonder then that she dreaded to hear them ? that their merriest peals had a touch of sorrow for her ; that she mourned and wept in the weary watches of the night, when on the still calm air there arose no other sound, save that melancholy ocean bell, and the sobs from a mother's heart ?

Oh, poor humanity!—Oh, poor humanity!

How she wrestled and struggled and prayed! How she hoped against hope, and defied death to take her sweet boy from her! How she grew angry almost with life, and hated the little children who had been his playmates, for the rich young blood that pinked their healthful faces, the strong glad life that flowed through their veins!

Why should they live, and he die?

Why should they laugh, while he could scarcely smile?

Was God just? Was religion true?

It was then, while wrestling with her terrible agony, that Lady Slade most keenly felt the need of some friend into whose faithful breast she could pour out all her troubles, and to whom she could turn for comfort and advice.

Mrs. Burton was all that a kind and motherly nurse could be, but she did not understand and could have no sympathy with those finer feelings of the heart, which constituted Beatrice's real suffering. To

Mrs. Burton, the death of an innocent child was but a little thing. The stern puritanical woman was capable of bearing far greater trials with a calm, unmoved face.

Catherine, Rosamond, and Maria, each in turn stood by the little bed and mingled their tears with those of the wretched mother ; still they could not stay long, their husbands wanted them; and they left her, to forget, in the world's allurements and their own happy homes, that sad picture of a fair young life cut off in its earliest bloom.

As one by one they left her, Beatrice felt more and more desolate.

Homeless and poor before, she was friendless now !

The thought would come, banish it as she might, If *he* had been here, would he have deserted her ? Would anything in the world have kept him from her, if he only knew she required his presence ?

What could she do but murmur amidst unavailing sobs,—“ Oh ! why did he go ? Oh ! why did he leave me ? ”

At last there came a time when the boy could no longer bear to be carried down to the shore, but lay on his little couch at the open window, where he could see the sea, and the ships, and the bright blue sky, and the laughter of children's voices was wafted to him on the wind.

And then came Beatrice's agony. Who is it that says, "consumption is a beautiful death to die?" Have they ever seen it? Have they ever had one whom they dearly loved taken from them by the insidious destroyer, who looks so much like life, we cannot believe it death? The hot burning hands, the poor parched lips, the weary wasting cough, the struggle and fight for breath!

Have they watched, as Beatrice watched, the little limbs grow thinner and thinner, day by day, the pulses throbbing fast in every vein, the bones protruding through the tender skin? Have they watched, as Beatrice watched, the slow decline that was so terribly sure; the sufferings and agony almost impossible to describe? Then

would they pray as Beatrice prayed at last, that God in His infinite mercy would have pity and take her darling soon !

He would sit up to the last, even when his poor trembling fingers were too weak to grasp the side of his little cot, and his wasted frame fell helplessly against the pillows kind and loving hands had placed around him. His eyes, now grown preternaturally large, would wander from the sea to his mother's face, and his smiles, even to death most sweet and loving, were given to her alone.

"Don't cry, mamma, don't cry," he would say, between the paroxysms of his painful cough. "Francis is going to a happy land, where the flowers don't die, and the sun is always shining, and the little Jesus will come and play with me, and I will ask him to let you come too."

Beatrice turned away to hide her choking sobs.

"Don't cry, or you will make me cry too, mamma, and it makes my cough so

bad—so bad. I shall soon be better, and I'm not the least afraid; the good Jesus said, 'Little children were to come unto Him.' I've not been a very naughty boy, have I mamma? I've always liked to say my prayers."

He would have his little bed covered with a curious medley of books, toys, flowers, cakes he could not eat, articles of dress, broken playthings. He who was so generous before, strenuously refused to allow them to be removed, but lay, his treasures round him, his small attenuated fingers grasping them even in sleep.

His favourites were a string of black beads, that belonged to his mother, and a little silver crucifix she wore, and, one day, creeping gently to his bed-side, she found him asleep—*dead asleep*, the beads round his neck, the crucifix clasped to his breast, and the light of another world on his beautiful angelic brow.

CHAPTER XI.

WON AT LAST.

A YEAR has passed away since little Francis died, and Lady Slade's anxious friends again use their utmost endeavours to induce her to return to the fashionable world. Rosamond first of all : she came to mingle her tears with those of the bereaved mother, for she had dearly loved the dead boy ; and her own maternal happiness had taught her how terrible must Lady Slade's trial be. She would have carried the unhappy lady back with her to Trelawney Castle, and have tried all that love and the truest friendship could do to cheer the heart so sorely stricken.

But Beatrice would not listen to her pleadings. Her heart she said was in her dead boy's grave, and the very sight of Rosamond's children made her grief the greater, by the painful remembrance of what she had lost. She thanked her generous, warm-hearted friend, but avowed her intention of never returning to that society in which she had found so much hollowness, so much unhappiness and deceit.

Then Maria Vivian, with her gallant Plunger, paid Sunnyside a visit, and tried to prevail upon Lady Slade to return with them to their home, in order to shake off, as Maria expressed it, the melancholy which now seemed Beatrice's normal condition ; "God never intended people to go about with faces like fiddles, the idea of a pretty young widow like Beatrice shutting herself up for ever, because a bad husband had thought proper to take himself out of the world."

As for poor little Francis, she thought it quite wicked to repine about him ; he evidently would have grown up into a very

delicate youth, and perhaps might have followed in his unfortunate father's footsteps, whereas she knew now, whatever she might suffer, her child was safe and happy.

To these perfectly true, yet thoughtless suggestions, Lady Slade returned the same answer: her friends were very kind, but she now had no earthly reason to mix with the world again, and preferred to live a quiet and retired life.

"She will end in a lunatic asylum," said Maria to her Plunger, afterwards, and the gallant captain replied, "Weally, how wevy shocking."

Then Lady Jones, after writing and writing in vain, came down in all her paraphernalia of velvets and furs, determined not to return to London without her recreant sister. She put up at the one little hotel in the place, and astonished the weak nerves of the people of that small seaside town, by appearing in a different costume every day, each more gorgeous than the last.

Lady Jones was evidently determined to make the most of her matrimonial bargain,

and revelled in the worldly goods her wealthy alliance had brought her, as if she had discovered all the treasures of the pre-adamite Sultans.

Plantagenet had not been married a year before he discovered that, as far as any hope of love from his beautiful wife was concerned, he might just as well have united himself to a marble statue.

She was courteous and amiable, and treated him with an amount of deference and respect, which, considering the secret contempt she really entertained for his character, was perfectly marvellous, she headed his table with a languid grace that was essentially her own, and was unanimously declared to be the handsomest woman of her day ; but, whether proudly reclining in her carriage in the parks, or radiant with diamonds and beauty at the drawing-rooms, Lady Jones had really but one predominant thought—The Church!

She would leave the most brilliant assemblage for an afternoon's service at Saint Margaret's ; she would give up the gayest ball to be ready for even-song.

And she *did* do good.

There was not a charity or subscription that her name did not head. She built churches, endowed schools, and sent Plantagenet's money flying all over the country in her numberless benefactions. Many a wretched family was saved from the workhouse by her generous charity. "The poor rose up and blessed her, and the rich, they praised her."

But no one knew her heart ! no one could say with truth that they counted the rich and beautiful Lady Jones amongst their most intimate friends ; no one ever penetrated the icy veil that hung over that lovely perfect form.

Farthest of all from her confidence was her own husband. In every exterior observance she was all that a wife should be ; he might look at her, admire her, exhibit the beauty he had bought to society in general, and his friends in particular, she invariably accompanied him wherever he went, obeyed him in every wish, but never a word of love passed her lips, never an

answering glance met his from those glorious heavenly eyes.

“Chaste as ice, pure as snow,” she was equally as cold ! It might have been said of her, as was said of the Jansenist nuns of Port Royal, “she was as pure as an angel, but as proud as a devil.”

The amorous little banker tried and tried repeatedly to win some token of affection from his stately bride, but all in vain ! He might wear the jewel he had bought, and adorn it with the costliest setting he could find, but he might never penetrate its adamant surface ; the brilliant rays shone equally on him as on all around.

Plantagenet gave it up at last in despair, and the clubs saw far more of him than his Park Lane home ; nay, Rumour even whispered that he found consolation in another purchase, not quite so indifferent as his wife, but equally as expensive. Rumour always has something disagreeable to say even about the best of men. Catherine, supremely indifferent to both, smiled at ru-

mour and Calumny as she did at Plantagenet's love.

Apart from religion, the only interest she ever seemed to take was in her sister. She had been dreadfully grieved and disappointed at the death of the child, and the consequent failure of her intentions to restore him to his proper station in society. Whatever human affection she showed was lavished upon Lady Slade, and she really and sincerely regretted Beatrice's obstinate determination to withdraw herself from the fashionable world ; but no inducements, no considerations, could persuade Lady Slade to change her mind.

"I am very contented," pleaded the lovely widow ; "I have lost all taste for the pleasures of this life, I only desire peace. Why do you wish to take me from my chosen home? I have everything I can desire here, far more than I deserve."

"What nonsense you talk, Beatrice," cried Catherine, irritably, "the place is all

very well in its way, and it only shows (as Plantagenet says), 'how the man must have swindled you when he was at Chesham Court, to be able to keep up such an establishment;' but whether or not, it is scarcely fit for Lady Slade, *my* sister, to be living on the charity of her former dependent. You should have more pride, Beatrice."

Lady Slade flushed over neck and brow.

"Catherine! What do you mean? How can you say I am living on charity? I have a hundred a-year of my own, which is more than sufficient for my present wants."

Catherine laughed scornfully. "A hundred a-year! Do you know where that hundred a-year really comes from? From the man under whose roof you are living—whose bread you eat! How can you be so simple, Beatrice, you! a woman of the world! Sir Reginald did not leave a penny behind him, every shilling went to his creditors."

Beatrice looked at her sister in amazed astonishment: "Is that true, Catherine?" she gasped.

"Perfectly true. Ask Plantagenet if it is not? Ask Baxter and Higgins? Mr. Burton thinks no doubt he is doing an act of justice, as we see conscience-money advertised in the *Times*, but now you know the truth you cannot possibly accept it any longer. I dare say it was the knowledge of what he had done, that made him quit the country."

Beatrice, who had been standing lost in thought, started at her last words.

"Oh, stop, Catherine!" she exclaimed, impatiently, "you do not know what you are talking about; promise me faithfully that I shall not see any one, and I will return with you to London."

Catherine was too delighted with the idea of getting Beatrice away, to make any objection. Once get the recluse to London she thought her return to society was a matter of course.

Lady Slade, however, adhered to her resolution, and when in town never drove out except to the lawyer's office, where she received full confirmation of her sister's statement.

The lawyers informed her that they drew the money from Mr. Burton's account, at the London and Westminster Bank, and forwarded it to her ladyship by his desire. They had always considered it a trust fund of some sort, and supposed Lady Slade was perfectly acquainted with the matter.

Beatrice thanked them, merely saying "she had called to make a few enquiries; the affair rested simply with Mr. Burton and herself."

At the expiration of a week, Catherine was both surprised and annoyed, by Beatrice announcing her intention of returning to Sunnyside.

Lady Jones could not understand such infatuation, "at least," she said, "I shall insist on being your banker, while you are there. I could not think of allowing

my sister to rest under an obligation to any one; only think what people would say if they knew."

Beatrice smiled a shy, sweet smile. "They do not know, Catherine," she replied. "I am 'Out of Society' now—nevertheless you are right, I will accept your kindness, so long as I remain under Mr. Burton's roof."

It was the evening after her return from London, that she was sitting in her usual way at the little drawing-room window, leaning her head upon her hand, and watching the waves with their white foamy crests, rolling majestically on to the shore, the spray dashing over the little promenade.

She was very thoughtful and silent, and Mrs. Burton, who loved her as dearly as though she were her own daughter, peered anxiously at her over the top of her spectacles.

Click—click went the knitting needles. "Thou art surely not fretting yet, after

that poor bairn—thou must cheer up, my dear, it's like doubting the providence of God. Sorrow we may, and for a reasonable time, but the will of God must be obeyed."

"How can I forget him, my poor little darling?"

"Nay, nay, I did not say forget, fret was the word I used. He would not return to thee again for all the world can give. What could the pleasures of life be to him who has seen the beauty of his Father's face?"

Lady Slade was gazing wistfully out at the sea. "I shall never get over it," she murmured; "it is the greatest trial I have ever known."

"Oh, my darling, there are worse wounds than parting with a little innocent child. How wouldst thou have felt had he been grown into a man and then had left thee?"

Beatrice rose from her seat, and crossing over to where Mrs. Burton sat, seated herself on the footstool at her feet.

"Mother," she said, in the familiar

phrase she used when they were quite alone, "Why did Robert go away?"

"Eh, my dearie?"

Beatrice was sitting, her hands clasped upon the old lady's knees, gazing into her astonished face.

Mrs. Burton took her spectacles from her eyes, wiped them, and stared at Lady Slade as if she did not comprehend what she meant.

"Why did he go away? tell me the real truth. Why did he leave us?"

Mrs. Burton grew nervous and fidgetty.

"Because—because," she said, hesitatingly, "he thought he would like Canada better than England."

"I am certain that was not his real reason," exclaimed Beatrice, impetuously. "He would never have left you like that! or, at least, he would have taken you with him. Tell me the truth, mother. Why did he leave us?"

For a moment Mrs. Burton did not answer, while the soft brown eyes were questioning hers in evident anxiety.

"Oh, my lady," she said at last, "I doubt I shall do wrong to tell thee, but thou must not be angry with my poor son—he *loved* thee, Lady Beatrice! though he was only thy servant once. Thou wast so kind and gentle to him; thou couldst not see the harm thou didst; but oh! my lady, the hearts of men are only flesh and blood, and thou art very fair to see! He went away, for he knew thou wert so far above him thou couldst never be his wife, and he put the sea between ye, knowing that God forgives where man does not, and in His Holy sight all creatures are alike."

Lady Slade did not speak, but rose and quitted the room suddenly, leaving the poor old lady in doubt as to whether she had offended her or not. When they next met, however, Beatrice had re-assumed her usual calm demeanour, but made no allusion to their former conversation.

About a week afterwards, Mrs. Burton

was sitting in the same room engaged as usual in knitting, when Lady Slade entered, attired for her morning's walk, holding a letter in her hand. She was looking brighter and happier than she had done since her boy's death, and there was an evidence of care about her costume that betokened Lady Slade was becoming more like the elegant Beatrice of happier days.

Mrs. Burton noticed these signs with pleasure; naturally cheerful, she had regarded Beatrice's continued depression of spirits with great concern, terrified lest her gentle charge should at length sink beneath her accumulated troubles.

However, Beatrice had lately shown tokens of a quieter frame of mind, and had taken much delight in conversing with the children who had been Francis's little playmates and friends. She entered as formerly into their amusements, buying them cakes and toys, and talking with them for hours of the dead boy, whose grave they kept supplied with flowers.

The poor also in the neighbourhood had reason to remember Lady Slade, and many a respectful curtsy was dropped, many a blessing given, as she passed to and fro in her walks on the sands, or along the edge of the cliff.

They were very simple and primitive people in Sunnyside, mostly fishermen and their families, and Beatrice delighted to visit their humble dwellings, and enter into all their troubles as if she had known them for years.

On this particular morning she looked so radiant and charming, that Mrs. Burton could not help remarking it.

"Thou art getting like thy bonny self again," she said with a glad smile; "it does my old eyes good to see thee look like that. Art going to the post, my dear?"

"Yes," replied Beatrice, smiling and blushing, but making no attempt to depart.

The sun was shining brightly on the sea, which sparkled as though covered with

myriads of diamonds ; the soft white clouds sailed over the azure sky, the singing of the fishermen was heard in the distance.

Mrs. Burton laid down her knitting and looked out.

"Thou hast a lovely day for thy walk, my darling, and thou lookest as fresh as a rose already. I'd take a run down by the shore before I came back if I was thee."

Lady Slade came over and knelt down by the old woman's side, her arms about her neck, her head resting on that faithful breast ; a tremulous smile played round the sweet red lips, the colour went and came on the shy downcast face.

"Mother," she whispered, "I have been writing to ask Robert to come and see us. Do you think he will?"

For a moment there was no reply ; and then two aged hands were raised in thanksgiving above the graceful drooping head, two large tears stole down the withered cheeks, and a voice broken by sobs went

reverently over the solemn grandeur of the sea: "Lord, now lettest thou Thy servant depart in peace ; according to Thy word."

THE END.



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